
Daughters of Zion:
Jewish Women in Victorian Literature

by
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To my grandmother,
for encouraging me to write.

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Abstract

The Jewish woman plays a surprising role in nineteenth-century literature; rather than being a marginalized “other” due to her religion and gender, the Jewess instead paradoxically embodies the ideals of Victorian British nationalism and womanhood. I will focus my studies on four nineteenth century novels—Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819), Charles Lever’s *That Boy of Norcott’s* (1869), George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876), and Walter Besant’s *The Rebel Queen* (1893). Each text contains one or more young Jewish woman characters, all of which share some common attributes, but also differ in significant ways. I will study these women through the lens of British nationalist ideology, examining how Christian authors use the figure of the Jewess to communicate theories of national survival. The Jewish woman’s liminal position in British society—she is not fully local or foreign, religious or heathen—renders her a complex, multi-dimensional character, useful for examining the deep-seated ideologies underlying Victorian beliefs and practices.

I devote one chapter to setting up the ideological background and problems of nineteenth-century British nationalism, and a second to focusing on two Jewish woman characters who defy the mold of the other Jewesses, straying from the “paragon of virtue” role generally assigned to Jewish women figures. I then turn to the heart of my argument, analyzing the narratives of the four Jewish women I mainly study: Mirah Lapidoth of *Daniel Deronda*, Rebecca of York from *Ivanhoe*, Sarah Oppovich in *That Boy of Norcott’s*, and Francesca Elveda of *The Rebel Queen*. When examined from the angles of economics, femininity, sexuality, and marriage practices, each woman’s narratives and choices provide insight into the inner workings of nationalist ideology. Ultimately, the Jewesses of Victorian literature, in their unique positioning between “insider” and “outsider” status, function as tools allowing authors to explore compelling and intimate issues of the era, from nationalism and collective ideology to personal happiness and integrity.

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Short Titles

Besant, Walter. *The Rebel Queen*. London: Harper and Brothers, 1893. (Besant)

Eliot, George. *Daniel Deronda*. New York: The Modern Library, 2002. (Originally published 1876.) (Eliot)

Lever, Charles. *That Boy of Norcott's*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1902. (Originally published 1869) (Lever)

Scott, Sir Walter. *Ivanhoe*. New York: The Modern Library, 2001. (Originally published 1819) (Scott)

...From the Rebecca of *Ivanhoe*...the Jewess has a well-defined function in even the most serious novels. Frequently violated or beaten, she sometimes succeeds in escaping dishonor by means of death, but that is a form of justice; and those who keep their virtue are docile servants or humiliated women in love with indifferent Christians who marry Aryan women.
--Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*¹

Understanding the Victorian Jewess:²
An Introduction

Browsing through the selection of films at a local Barnes and Noble, I spotted Tom Hooper's 2002 adaptation of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. Reading the back of the video case, I was surprised to discover that it was based on a Victorian novel with Jewish characters, a combination I hadn't realized even existed. I checked out a paperback copy of Eliot's novel from the library, and engrossed myself in its dramatic story. The characters drew me in—Gwendolen's chilling marriage, Daniel's thoughtful spiritual quest, and Mirah's attempt to rise above her traumatic childhood. When I chose to write a thesis, I knew I would focus on *Daniel Deronda* in some form. Then, while reading Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, the similarities between Rebecca of York and Mirah Lapidoth³ struck me, and my final topic germinated—the Jewish woman in nineteenth century literature.

¹ Quoted in Edgar Rosenberg's *From Shylock to Svengali* (73)

² While the term "Jewess" in reference to Jewish women is rarely used today, I have chosen to use the word because of its enormous prevalence in nineteenth century literature and lack of overt negative connotations.

³ Mirah uses both Lapidoth and Cohen as last names—although the original family surname was Cohen, "[Mirah's] father called us Lapidoth...a name of his forefathers" (Eliot, 190). To avoid confusion, I have chosen to use Lapidoth as Mirah's last name in this document.

I began researching Jewish woman characters in Victorian novels unsure if I would find any besides Mirah and Rebecca, and worried they would all conform to the negative stereotypes of women I expected to see. While the initial search took time, I came upon numerous examples of Jewish woman characters in nineteenth century literature, a fact that always surprises people who inquire into my thesis project. In addition, rather than representing a slew of negative images of women and minorities, the Jewesses I encountered are portrayed as intelligent, kind, and passionate, often more so than their Christian counterparts. As it turns out, the Jewish woman painted by non-Jewish Victorian novelists proves far more complex than I had thought, and provides fertile soil for exploration and analysis.

There are numerous reasons for assuming that Victorian texts would portray the Jewish woman in a negative light. The categories of both “Jew” and “woman” inspired some denigrating stereotypes in the nineteenth century, leading readers to expect Jewish women to be “doubly Other.”⁴ Andrea Freud Lowenstein describes the conflation of anti-Semitic and misogynistic stereotypes; for instance, some popular literature from the period analyzes Jews in the same lens as prostitutes (21). Not only did Jewish women face a bevy of negative images, they fought a battle for survival on two fronts, combating both their male co-religionists and Christian female peers. From the victimization the literary Jewess suffers from male Jewish characters to the romantic rivalry and blatant conversion attempts on behalf of Christian women, maintaining a solid identity becomes quite the challenge for the Jewish woman characters in Victorian novels.

⁴ Marilyn Demarest Button uses the term “doubly Other” to introduce her edited volume on *The Foreign Woman in British Literature*.

However, instead of coming across as demonic, unfeminine, and un-British, the Jewish woman instead embodies the nationalistic ideals of Victorian England. Victorian authors employ the figure of the Jewess as a tool to analyze English society, a method of using an “other” to explore the self. As Nancy Pell points out, “projection is one of the first steps towards self-recognition and possible change” (433-4). There are specific instances of this phenomenon in Victorian novels—Charles Lever’s *That Boy of Norcott’s* uses travel as a vehicle for better understanding one’s home, for example. But on a more general plane, using a figure as outside of the mainstream as the Jewess to comment on British society corroborates the psychological theory Pell introduces.

Not only is the Jewess a useful model for understanding England, but the narratives of the Jewish woman provide a forum for engaging in the conflicts and crises embedded in British nationalist ideology. According to Brian Cheyette, “the extreme ambivalence inherent in visions of the future in late Britain” was transferred onto Jewish characters in the literary realm (quoted in Valman, 242). Novelists also express “national guilt” (Ragussis 2, 117) over England’s cruel treatment of the Jews in centuries past. In this manner, positive images of Jews become a form of national self-redemption, which in turn ties to political success, since a nation’s military or economic collapse was often attributed to its lack of “righteousness” (quoted in Ragussis 2, 232).

The figure of the Jew, and the Jewess in particular, allows British literature to “explore the limits of its own foundations” (Cheyette, 11) and challenge the ideas underpinning English conceptions of empire, nation, and social responsibility. Because Jewish characters are so integrally associated with the success or failure of the British nation at large, their narratives take on extra significance. Within the stories of the

Jewess in particular, the personal indeed becomes political, as domestic and romantic plotlines converge or collide with larger national events. The critical assertion that “the domestic space and the space of empire are in fact not far apart” (Meyer, 28) echoes prominently in the doubled nature of the Jewish woman’s narratives, in which individual threads can never be separated from the larger tapestry.

The extraordinarily positive portrayal of the Jewess invites the question of whether gender is somehow more central than religion and race in these women’s self-definition. Both gender and religion share some similarities in their role as markers and shapers of identity. Cynthia Chase describes gender and Jewish identity as “structurally similar,” since both are “irreducible” and accompany “an enormous burden of cultural, spiritual, and historical significations” (quoted in Pell, 430). Critic Matthew Biberman elucidates a similar comparison, arguing, “woman is the negation of man” much like Judaism is “the negation of Christianity” (181). According to Biberman, medieval English literature weighs gender and religion in an opposite way than that of the Victorian period. In the Middle Ages, religion was considered a more consuming force than gender, rendering it acceptable for Christian men to display “feminine” traits, such as “mercy, caring, [and] nurturing” (Biberman, 20).⁵

In contrast to the medieval era’s placement of religion as a higher form of identification than gender, the Victorian era flipped this emphasis. During the nineteenth

⁵ Biberman takes this argument one step further, arguing that medieval authors viewed Christianity itself as closely tied to the feminine. As one critic phrases it, “[Jesus’] own flesh did womanly things: it bled, it bled food, and it gave birth” (quoted in Biberman, 52). Furthermore, the Catholic emphasis on Marian worship indicates a focus on the feminine. Biberman traces the shift away from the medieval emphasis on religion over gender, describing an increasing anxiety over Christianity’s femininity (53). In addition, the Protestant movement lacked Catholicism’s focus on the Virgin Mary, further departing from a feminine emphasis.

century, the cult of domesticity figured as a prominent overarching paradigm, with women maintaining religious and national virtue in the home and men engaging in the aggression and individualism of the economy.⁶ Feminine virtue underpinned the ideology of domesticity:

This conception of femininity played a major role in the construction of the Victorian ideology about the family; Victorian ideology about the family, in turn, was a cornerstone of the middle class world-view. (Gorham, 1)

The extremely positive depiction of Jewish woman characters in Victorian literature would seem to prove that female virtue can trump even a negative religious affiliation. Unlike the medieval era Biberman brings to life, in which religious forms the primary cornerstone of identity, the British middle class's reliance on feminine virtue as an ideal reverses the old system, pitting gender ahead of religion. Thus, the Victorian literary Jewess overcomes her "negative" religious background through adherence to idealized feminine attributes.

Novelists' treatment of Jewish men supports the theory that gender overpowers religion as a determining factor of identity in the novels I am focusing on. Unlike Jewish women, whose feminine virtue could overcome their background, Jewish men were often accused of various "sexual and financial plots" (Lowenstein, 21), betraying their "male" licentiousness and economic aggression. The media also subjected one of the most prominent Jewish men in England in the Victorian period, Benjamin Disraeli, to similar stereotypes. For instance, an 1877 cartoon depicts Disraeli as a leering snake to

⁶ I will explore critiques of the cult of domesticity in later chapters, as well as the many manifestations of the paradigm in Victorian literature.

Victoria's Eve, typecasting the Prime Minister as a male aggressor to Victoria's female innocence and virtue (in Voskuil, 161).

Beyond the negative portrayal of Jewish men, other popular literature at the time draws strong ties between womanhood, purity, and redeeming oneself from "polluted" racial or religious origins. In the meeting notes of the London Ladies' Auxiliary Society aiding the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews, "the infant females of Israel" are targeted for conversion, viewed as more redeemable than their male counterparts. The Society takes another step, comparing conversion to "women's work."

In this labor of love [converting Jews], the assistance of females is particularly requested: they are exhorted to form and fashion the rough materials, which it is hoped will become "the polished corners of the temple," or, "pillars in the temple of G-d." (London Society, 10)

Just as the Victorian woman was to take the "raw materials" the man has earned and use them to create a home imbued with both religious and nationalist virtue, the Society's words encourage women to apply the same logic to conversion. In this manner, ideal femininity becomes almost a weapon of persuasion, able to trespass social boundaries under the guise of virtue. Thus, while representations of the Jewess, like any literary images, are not uniform, gender often overpowers religion as an indicator of virtue in the narratives of Jewish women.

The seemingly tangential role of the Jewess in Victorian literature is in fact an important and complex phenomenon, and its study proves useful for a variety of reasons. First, studying Jewish woman characters allows me to engage with a long history of literary scholarship, both relying on previous theories and filling in some gaps that prior

critics have left. The image of the Jew in Victorian literature has been studied for decades; David Philipson produced a book on the topic as early as 1901.⁷ While many of the works analyzing the Jew in British literature—among them Rosenberg’s *From Shylock to Svengali*, Cheyette’s *Constructions of ‘the Jew’ in English Literature and Society*, and Cohen and Heller’s *Jewish Presences in English Literature*—contain passages discussing the Jewess, I have not come across a single volume solely devoted to the subject of Jewish woman characters in the Victorian period. As such, my work has involved exploring various critical methods of studying Jews and women in Victorian novels, and then applying them to my own analysis of the Jewess. I have also sought to fill other gaps in literary criticism, particularly in regards to the lesser-known of the novels I am using, Charles Lever’s *That Boy of Norcott’s* and Walter Besant’s *The Rebel Queen*. Since scant scholarship is available on either book,⁸ I have once again been required to employ my own application of other critics’ theories to these works.

The Jewish woman character is also vital to study because her narrative occurs within the context of the major issues and dynamics of the Victorian era, especially nationalism. Nancy Henry argues that Victorian novelists “saw the nation’s future in terms of literary...representation” (147), placing the novel at the heart of a nationalist vision, and its characters the arbiters of that fictional future. Each of the novels I am studying features nationalism as an overriding narrative, operating significantly behind the individual scenes and plotlines of the characters. The national narrative is particularly evident in *Ivanhoe*, as Sir Walter Scott chooses to set his novel in the medieval era,

⁷ Lowenstein includes the publication of Philipson’s text, *The Jew in English Fiction*, in her Appendix (321).

⁸ Even anthologies of Lever’s work pay little attention to *That Boy of Norcott’s*, and there are few articles on Besant’s novel.

situating his character's story in the era of England's budding statehood. The novel's events occur after William the Conqueror overtakes England in the Battle of Hastings, as the Normans and Saxons still battle for control of the British Isles. Meanwhile, Richard II "the Lion-Hearted" fights a Crusade abroad, leaving his brother John in charge of England. Although *Ivanhoe*'s ancient setting may appear far removed from the political machinations of nineteenth century England, in fact, similarities abound.⁹ Both time periods situate England at the brink of either creating a strong national identity or disintegrating into factions, both refer to a faraway empire, be it nineteenth century colonialism or Richard II's Crusade, and both pivot around a struggle for the soul of British identity, so to speak.

Engaging in the larger project of defining England as a nationalist entity, the novelists I have read seem to be in dialogue with one another, adding to or rewriting previous texts as part of their own works. This exchange of ideas frequently revolves around the Jewish presence in England, evoking the character of the Jewess. For instance, the chronological proximity of George Eliot and Anthony Trollope's writing, both of which focus on Jews, albeit with a drastically different approach, indicates "the pitch that 'the Jewish question' reached" (Ragussis 2, 234) in the nineteenth century. Eliot also read Sir Walter Scott when she was young (Levitt, 98),¹⁰ adding more interconnectedness to the authorial world of Victorian England. These well-known writers also echo and modify lesser-known texts. One example is the spate of popular

⁹ Although *Ivanhoe* was published in 1819, slightly prior to the Victorian period, the novel figures so prominently in Victorian texts that I chose to include it in this study.

¹⁰ Levitt garners this information from Eliot's personal papers and correspondence.

novels featuring the “dying Jewess” trope (Ragussis 2, 37);¹¹ Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* rewrites that storyline by having Mirah Lapidoth almost drown and survive, figuratively rising from the dead.

Understanding the role of Jews in British society, and the literary manifestations of popular ideas, also allows the reader to think about other conflicts, which appear in the novels I am studying alongside the pitfalls of anti-Semitism. The persecution of the Saxons in *Ivanhoe* correlates with the negative treatment of Jews,¹² as both groups are minorities struggling against the majority Norman rule. The “Irish issue” appears prominently in Lever’s *That Boy of Norcott’s*, in which the author also draws parallels between anti-Irish and anti-Semitic rhetoric. On a more tangential level, Victorian novelists’ frequent derisive comments about Arabs bring in another group to connect to the Jewish struggle for survival, while the Civil War and African-American slavery appears in author biographies,¹³ if less so in the texts themselves. Studying Jews in the context of other “Others” can at times be useful, particularly since some authors, such as George Eliot, situated Jews at “the center of her understanding of liberal progress” (Cheyette, 43). However, taking such a comparison too far can ignore the issues affecting Jews specifically.¹⁴ Just as the Jewess proves ideal rather than denigrated, the often liminal place of the Jews in the British imagination renders studying the group independently a fruitful effort.

¹¹ In these novels, the protagonist, a Jewish woman, converts to Christianity, sickens, and dies, leaving her Gentile love interest to freely marry a Christian woman.

¹² Michael Ragussis draws a detailed comparison between the roles of Saxons and Jews in *Ivanhoe* in his book, *Figures of Conversion*.

¹³ Levitt describes George Eliot’s correspondence with American abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Levitt, 98).

¹⁴ For this reason, I will not focus on other minorities in great depth in this thesis.

Paying careful attention to literary stereotypes and how they operate is an important pursuit because of its far-reaching academic and real-life results. As Brian Cheyette points out, to ignore representations is akin to perpetuating them (374). “Literary anti-Semitism” (Cheyette, 2) closely connects to popular and actualized prejudice as well. A wide range of critics, among them the prominent literary scholar F. R. Leavis, reject the “Jewish half” of *Daniel Deronda*; Leavis himself suggests that the Jewish plotline be removed entirely for the novel (Heller, 78).¹⁵ It is difficult to separate these virulent attacks on a literary portrayal from period anti-Semitism.¹⁶ Thus, novelistic art and social life are not two completely separate spheres, but converge in important ways that the literary critic can analyze.

I will focus my argument on four main novels, each of which prominently feature one or more Jewish woman characters. The earliest of the novels is Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819), a historical fiction volume telling the story of Rebecca of York, a young Jewish woman who falls in love with Sir Wilfred Ivanhoe, a Saxon knight. Following Rebecca through numerous dramatic obstacles, Scott paints an alluring portrait of the Jewish woman that serves as a powerful model for later authors. Irish author Charles Lever’s 1869 work, *That Boy of Norcott’s*, details a Christian youth’s growing love for Sarah Oppovich, the daughter of his Jewish employer. George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876) describes a Jewish man’s discovery of his origins and budding romance with

¹⁵ Claudia Johnson provides a detailed analysis of Leavis’s response to *Daniel Deronda* in her article, “F.R. Leavis: The ‘Great Tradition’ of the English Novel and the Jewish Part.”

¹⁶ Similarly, history texts often credit Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with encouraging the American abolitionist movement, demonstrating the close ties between art and life.

Mirah Lapidoth, a modest, feminine, and talented Jewess modeled on Scott's Rebecca. Finally, *The Rebel Queen*, Walter Besant's 1893 novel, depicts Francesca Elveda, a young Jewess who slowly discovers her religious roots and Victorian notions of gender as the narrative progresses.

I will begin my discussion with the role of English nationalism in the history of the Victorian period in general, and its relation to literature. Focusing on the place of women, minorities, and Jewish nationalism within the larger context of British nationalism, I will analyze how the Jewish woman in particular figures in the trope of nationalist ideology. In my second chapter, I will explore two women who present exceptions to the typical image of the Jewess; the texts portray both women negatively for interesting reasons. Third, I will study the role of economics in Victorian novelists' portrayal of Jewish women. Since economics and femininity are integrally connected in the nineteenth century, exploring the place of Jewish women within that dynamic produces surprising results. Finally, I will include a chapter on sexuality, connecting the theme to the role of conversion and national regeneration in the narratives of Jewish women.

At the close of this study, I hope to present a nuanced and complex analysis of the Jewess in Victorian literature. A multifaceted and intriguing character with at times contradictory attributes and chameleon-like qualities, the Jewess is difficult to pin down in a simple monolithic argument, instead producing seemingly endless layers of interpretation. Most of all, studying the Jewish woman of the Victorian novel yields a treasury of ideas, delving into the very core of Victorian notions of gender, nationalism, race, and human identity.

This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
 This other-Eden, demi-paradise,
 This fortress built by nature for herself...
 Against the envy of less happier lands;
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.
 --*Richard II*, II.i.40-50

Chapter I

Writing England: Literature, English Nationalism and the Jewish Woman

Nationalism played a powerful role in the Victorian period, exerting a strong influence on nineteenth century English literature. Nationalism, and the agendas that emerge from it—among them imperialism and colonialism—are important actors in the novels I am studying. Recent literary criticism presents abundant discussions of nationalist ideology; however, these critiques have limitations, particularly for the study of Jewish women. Defining either Jews or women within nationalistic terms is a challenging undertaking, rendering the position of the Jewess particularly elusive. The combination of gendered and religious identity markers in the stories of Mirah, Rebecca, Sarah, and Francesca, the Jewish women characters I am focusing on, produces a complex, and at times contradictory, glimpse into British nationalist discourse.

The concept of nationalism is difficult to define, but Benedict Anderson's attempt provides a useful model. Anderson identifies nationalism as an "imagined political community" (6) sharing several characteristics. First, nationalism theorizes nations within limits since they are not universal, but contained within "finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (7). In addition, nationalist ideology imagines countries as sovereign, independent of other states and their influences (7).

Finally, nationalist thinkers visualize their nations as communities founded on “horizontal comradeship” (7), regardless of the actual class and social stratification in many societies. Due to the fictions that nationalism relies on, Anderson views these ideologies as creating fictional nations, rather than describing societies that actually exist (6).

While nationalism had been a part of English ideology long before the Victorian period,¹⁷ the rapid social change occurring in the period elicited a growth in nationalistic fervor, and an increased anxiety about defining “Englishness” and its boundaries. Many of the social upheavals abroad challenged England’s own perceived social stability. The dramatic political situation in France presented a terrifying alternative to its European neighbors, from the Revolution and ensuing Reign of Terror in 1789 to the bloody Napoleonic wars. Critic Marlon B. Ross describes Napoleon as “a military threat to Britain’s national sovereignty, an ideological threat to Britain’s sense of its own sacred national tradition, and an economic threat to Britain’s capitalist expansion” (Arac, 70). Thus, French expansion during Napoleon’s reign was seen as a direct attack on the British nation, leading to more clearly articulated notions of the British character. In addition, Todd Endelman points out that the Civil War in the United States dramatically challenged traditional societal hierarchy, lending credence to the threat of marginal groups gaining power in mainstream society.

¹⁷ Historically, nationalism made its debut around the late eighteenth century (Anderson, 4), as a result of many societal transitions. From the Enlightenment and its ensuing disenchantment with religious doctrine (11), to the decline of a strong belief in sacred monarchy (21), nationalism filled in many of the gaps left by the changing ideologies prior to the Victorian period. Linda Colley’s *The Britons* provides an in-depth exploration of the rise and manifestations of nationalism within England in particular.

Just as Europe experienced immense change in and around the Victorian period, Britain itself underwent significant adjustments. England's economic system had made the transition from a feudal society to an industrial one, laying the "framework of the modern industrial system" (Perkins, 2) in which scientific innovation transformed the traditional distribution of wealth. Bernard Semmel discusses period philosophers who

pictured the coming of the modern as a movement from the traditional 'status' of a hierarchical society, where every man and woman occupied a position established at birth, to the 'contract' of a modern society, where privileges and obligations were determined by individual worth. (Semmel, 5)

Shifting from a hierarchical English society to visions of a more egalitarian culture required a shift in the English "imagination" of itself, particularly in terms of the connections between economics and identity.

The sweeping changes affecting England, both foreign and domestic, shaped the literature produced in the period. Many critics focus on the interplay between history and fiction, agreeing with Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo that "politics at the level of the state has great importance for many of the major developments in nineteenth century writing" (1). Michael Ragussis situates the novel "at the center of a crisis in national identity" (Ragussis 2, 7), charged with the task of processing the shifting landscape of the world. Marlon B. Ross insightfully sums up an important agenda of this era's literature:

Looking out on a moment of revolutionary crisis...the British needed to somehow organize this period of rapid change and rapid expansion, to justify their development into a modern nation-state while retaining the sense of inherently ordained order that characterized their then-eroding socio-economic structure. (Ross, 56)

Echoing Anderson's description of nationalism as an "imagined community," literature plays a vital role in "imagining" a nationalist state.¹⁸

Inherent in the study of nationalism are its offshoots, colonialism and imperialism. At the same time as England anxiously watched the tumultuous events in Europe and in its own economy, the country continued its involvement as a colonial power, with territories as scattered as India and Hong Kong.¹⁹ Symbolically, Queen Victoria added the title of "Empress" to her royal repertoire (Bongie, 274), highlighting the increasing centrality of imperialism to British national identity. Arac and Ritvo define imperialism as a "historically crucial process by which an "other" conceived as exotic is represented and subordinated for the purpose of strengthening the worldly place of a...nation-state" (Arac, 3). Once the nation establishes colonies, it uses imperialism to control its subjects, leading to a third process of exoticism, in which the colonized society is described in exaggerated or fantastical terms, disregarding its actual culture or practices. Often, writers use the terms "savage" versus "civilized" to contrast the conquering nation and the conquered. Finally, in his discussion of nineteenth century and contemporary literature, critic Edward Said famously coins the term "Orientalism," referring to a "set of images [of the East] which become intransigent prejudices in Western thought and art" (Henry, 9). The combined processes of imperialism, colonialism, exoticism, and Orientalism create a complex dynamic between the colonizer and colony in literature, strongly shaping the colonizer's national "self."

¹⁸ Furthermore, without the existence of print capitalism, creating a national consciousness among varying groups in different locations would have been extremely difficult (Anderson, 44).

¹⁹ Great Britain acquired Hong Kong as a colony in 1842.

Paradoxically, imperialism can present a threat to national identity, creating a crisis in which literature once again figures prominently. As the British nation expanded to include colonies, it struggled to retain its “essential” national identity.²⁰ Literature played a powerful role in representing the colonies to the British public, shaping a distinct nineteenth century British nationalism. In an era with limited photos or other mediums of transmitting images, the written word became a crucial arbiter of information about the non-Western world for the British audience. Michael Ragussis emphasizes the implications of learning about “the racial Other” (Ragussis 2, 60) solely through representations, asking what it means to love or hate a group based on a literary image. While paintings, daguerreotypes, and other visual mediums flourished during the Victorian era, written works still functioned as primary avenues of information.

As part of the current backlash against imperialist ideology, some modern critics accuse Victorian novelists of “a general complicity with imperialism” (Meyer, 8), while others go as far as asserting that the genre of the novel itself, which gained popularity in the Victorian period, is imperialistic, focusing on one point of view to the exclusion of other perspectives (Henry, 10). According to the critics who argue this point, the novel “is thought to concentrate control in a single omniscient English individual in a manner that reflect[s] and subsequently encourage[s] the control that England exerted over its empire” (Henry, 10). In this manner, critics view Victorian novelists’ decisions, even the choice of a genre, as integrally associated with imperialism and the definition of English identity.

²⁰ Marlon B. Ross expresses a similar concept, asking, “How does a nation grow to become itself?” (Ross, 56)

While the practice of critiquing English imperialism and nationalism produces interesting literary perspectives, this approach has limitations. First, accusing nineteenth century novelists of producing “exoticism” and the like can be an anachronistic argument, since colonialism was not as negatively labeled in the Victorian era as it is today. Nancy Henry argues against the “imposition of knowledge about later events—and systems of value arising from such knowledge—on texts...historically situated in the beliefs and practices of an earlier time” (115).²¹ To use Henry’s argument, applying these modern connotations of nationalism to texts written in an earlier era would be inaccurate and anachronistic.

Since both Jews and women have an ambivalent role in nationalist ideology, representations of both groups illuminates the complexities and contradictions of nationalist discourse, particularly in its literary manifestations. Susan Meyer points out that “ideology works not uniformly, but variously, on the different members of a society” (201), indicating that colonialism and imperialism approach different categories in differing ways, and that people and groups interpret nationalist discourse individually. Lisa Lowe reiterates that “discourses are never singular; discourses operate in conflict, they overlap and collude” (219). Thus, when investigating the role of both Jews and women in nationalism, it is important to recognize that nationalist discourse can be ambivalent, contradictory, and anything but monolithic.

While Orientalism in its classic form suggests an “insider/outsider dichotomy” (Henry, 120), this concept does not sufficiently articulate the position of Jews. As Judith Lewin points out, “Judaism defies the East-West binary” (1), since Judaism religiously

²¹ For instance, Semmel points out that nationalism takes on new meaning in the twentieth century as a result of Adolf Hitler’s jingoism and the Holocaust (14).

provides “the problematic place of origin for Christianity,” but novelists still portray Judaism as “Eastern.” For instance, Oliver Lovesey points out that the Jewish character Daniel Deronda “synthesizes East and West” (Button, 122). Ragussis also quotes a Christian missionary who claims, “Christianity is the true Jewish religion” (32), indicating the perception of Judaism and Christianity as two branches from the same tree.

The Jews’ liminal status between East and West forces English nationalists to debate their appropriate category. British anatomist Robert Knox (1791-1862) asks plainly, “are the Jews a dark race?” (Meyer, 15). Often, the answer is in the affirmative. Knox bizarrely concludes that “the purest of the Jewish race is a dark tawny, yellow-colored person, with jet-black hair and eyes seemingly colored, there is no mistaking the race when pure: it is Egyptian—that is, African” (Meyer, 15-16).²² Todd Endelman discusses more traditional anti-Semitic arguments from a Christian perspective, asserting, “the Jews, having murdered Jesus, had placed themselves outside humanity; spiritually and physically, they were marked as perpetual aliens” (87). Thus, while the connection between the two religions was discussed, most English viewed Christianity as an eclipse of Judaism, rather than a partnership of any sort. The Christian tendency to both rely on Judaism as its place of origin and critique it as an outdated religion fosters the complexity with which Victorian novelists illustrate Jewish ethnicity.

Jews were further considered in a negative light because of their association with England’s nationalist nemesis, Spain.²³ Spain figured as an “other” to the English, since

²² Knox’s reference to prejudice against Africans provides a instance where anti-Semitism gets conflated with other examples of racial prejudice.

²³ The religious differences between Protestant England and Catholic Spain, as well as legendary events like the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 contributed to a hostile relationship between the two countries.

“as England attempt[s] to define...its own national identity, the history of Spain provided a dangerous model” (Ragussis 1, 477). English literature frequently associates Jews with Spain; most of the Jewish characters in the novels I discuss are Sephardim, or Jews of Spanish ancestry.²⁴ The connection between Judaism and Spain brings up the issue of Marranos, or “secret Jews” who hid their religious practice during the period of the Spanish Inquisition. Ragussis illuminates the trope of the “secret race” in Victorian fiction, in which “the Jew...keeps his race secret in order to invade and to subvert Christian culture” (Ragussis 1, 488). Furthermore, the execution of Marrano Rodrigo Lopez, Queen Elizabeth’s physician, for treason in 1594 lurked in the British imagination. The image of the “secret Jew” connotes disturbing alliances with Spain, as well as a general suspicion of Jews’ national loyalty beyond their own race.

British nationalism in the Victorian period went beyond defining England’s national identity, attempting to establish other nations, such as a Jewish country, as well. Jewish nationalism played a complex role in the tumultuous events of the nineteenth century. Michael Ragussis argues that England and France competed over which country would restore Jewish national sovereignty (Ragussis 2, 91), tying Jewish nationalism to the literal battles between the English and French during the Napoleonic Wars. Within English society, public opinion generally favored establishing Jews in their own state rather than accommodating them within British society and government. Historian Todd Endelman describes the anti-Semitic vitriol protesting the passage of a Jewish naturalization bill in 1753. Since the media’s general view maintained that “Jewish identity and English national identity were mutually exclusive” (Ragussis 2, 23),

²⁴ The category “Sephardic” includes Jews of Spanish, Portugese, and North African descent, but the term is often used in reference to Spanish Jews specifically.

organizations attempting to convert Jews suggested that they be “taken back to Palestine” (Ragussis 2, 51). The Jewish community, however, made concerted efforts to assimilate, abandoning traditional religious practices in favor of more mainstream customs (Endelman, 8).²⁵

This focus on Jewish nationalism also appears in novels from the period.²⁶ In George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, the Jewish characters Daniel and Mirah marry and depart for Palestine on a Jewish nationalist mission. As Daniel phrases it, “the idea that I am possessed with is that of restoring a political existence to my people, making them a nation again” (Eliot, 730). *Ivanhoe*’s Rebecca of York also leaves England at the close of the novel, despite *Ivanhoe*’s promise of protection. Traveling to the court of Mohammed Boadbil, King of Granada, Rebecca, too, must seek Jewish national stability elsewhere, significantly going to the same region of the world as Daniel does, the historic homeland of the Jewish nation.

Rather than being a separate arena from English nationalism, Victorian novels’ Jewish nationalism is in fact a manifestation of British nationalistic ideals. As part of the effort to establish a concrete definition of English distinctiveness, nineteenth-century writers sought to “define English national identity in relation both to other European national identities and to Jewish identity” (Ragussis 2, 8). Creating a stable Jewish nation

²⁵ Endelman explains that increasing amounts of Jews abandoned Orthodox Jewish observance (8). More importantly, Jews “rearranged their personal priorities in such a manner that their Jewishness came to occupy only a segment of their personal identity” (119). This trend indicates that emigration to Zion was unlikely to be the chief priority for most of the Anglo-Jewish community.

²⁶ In addition to focusing on Jewish nationalism, British novels discussed the problematic national identities of other groups, including the Irish. For instance, Charles Lever’s 1869 novel, *That Boy of Norcott’s*, illustrates the British colonialist presence in Ireland and its harmful effects on the local population.

also provided numerous benefits to England. Due to England's desire to view itself as a tolerant nation (Ragussis 2, 23), the history of England's persecution and expulsion²⁷ of Jews was a stain on the British conscience. As Ragussis emphasizes, "the regeneration of (English) consciousness" could be achieved with "the deliverance of the persecuted Jew" (Ragussis 1, 504). Eliot employs this idea, using Daniel Deronda's ethical Judaism to highlight the rampant materialism and corruption of the British gentry. By using Jewish nationalism to challenge "the rhetoric of Englishness" (Lovesey, 121), Eliot demonstrates the ways in which writings on Jewish nationalism are truly a reflection of English society and self-definition.

While the "proto-Zionism" (Meyer, 185) in *Daniel Deronda* has been called overly philo-Semitic, Eliot's enthusiasm for creating a Jewish state is actually problematic.²⁸ First of all, by removing British Jews to another location, Eliot and Scott effectively expel them from both text and country. Feminist scholar Susan Meyer views Daniel Deronda's departure as an evasion of social problems within England by "creating an idealized alternative society" (170). Meyer goes on critique proto-Zionism in general, claiming, "this proto-Zionist fervor ran counter to the desires of most Jews, contained elements of blatant anti-Semitism, and was clearly used to further British imperialist self-interest" (185-6). Meyer's mention of imperialism alludes to the Middle East's convenient location, providing access to important trade routes (186) and containing raw

²⁷ Jews were formally expelled from England in 1290, and only allowed to return in 1655 under Oliver Cromwell's rule. In the interim, Jews did reside in England, but were forced to formally renounce their religion and practice as crypto-Jews, if at all.

²⁸ Critic Oliver Lovesey views Daniel and Mirah less as Jewish nationalist figures, instead becoming "citizens of the world" (124), going beyond nationalism itself. I disagree with this argument, however, because Daniel's repetition of "my people" (Eliot, 730), as well as his deliberate choice of the Jewish Mirah over the Gentile Gwendolen bespeaks a particular national identity, rather than a universal one.

materials able to garner wealth for Britain. Furthering the arguments that counter proto-Zionism's apparent altruism, readers can view Eliot and Scott's decision to expel the Jewish characters as a form of racial purification (Meyer, 187), separating each race to its designated location. Meyer also adds, "Eliot's celebration of Jewish nationalism is at heart about English nationalism, about guarding the boundaries of the English nation" (192). Thus, while some critics view Eliot's Zionist vision as a response to the Jewish plight,²⁹ others contend that discussions of Jewish nationalism tend to be deflections from the real issue at hand, English nationalism.

Another issue complicating the representation of Jewish nationalism in Victorian novels is the anachronistic way in which these texts describe Jews. As opposed to the evolutionary discourse emerging in the nineteenth century, many Victorians viewed Jewish history through an ahistorical lens, seeing the Jews as having simply stagnated since the ancient biblical past. Ragussis uses the term "negative historicization," arguing that "[the Jews] are fictionalized and figuralized as no more than an ancient race, divorced from the living Jews of contemporary England" (Ragussis, 217). The novels I focus on continually laud the ancient greatness of the Jews, separating them from the modern Jewish nation. The Christian protagonist of Charles Lever's *That Boy of*

²⁹ Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* was actually a powerful inspiration for Jewish nationalism, as chronicled in Ruth Levitt's *George Eliot: the Jewish Connection*. Levitt describes the impact of the novel on leaders of the budding Zionist movement. For instance, Eliezer ben Yehudah, credited with modernizing the Hebrew language, supposedly abandoned a French medical career after reading Eliot's book (44), while Henrietta Szold, who founded the Zionist women's organization Hadassah, copied passages from the novel into her scrapbook (49). Levitt even mentions a man who converted after reading Eliot's novel (44), pronouncing, "I am Daniel Deronda" (72). David Kaufman, a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Budapest writing in the late nineteenth century, lauds the author for "having perceived with the prophetic eye of genius the proper moment for answering the fundamental questions of Judaism, and investing them with a poetic charm" (20).

Norcott's bemoans, "what grand things did the love of [Jewish] women inspire in ancient times, and what splendid natures were theirs!" (588). *Ivanhoe's* Rebecca of York similarly defends her people by asserting,

We number names among us...names that ascend far back to those high times when the Divine Presence shook the mercy-seat between the cherubim, and which derive their splendor from no earthly prince, but from the awful Voice which bade their fathers be nearest of the congregation to the Vision. Such were the princes of the House of Jacob. (Scott, 445)

However, immediately after this speech of national pride, Rebecca bemoans, "such *were* the princes of Judah, now such no more!" (Scott, 446). Thus, the constant references to Judaism's past greatness appear complimentary, but in fact reduce the Jewish nation to a mere shell; instead of fulfilling the notion of historical progress, the Jewish nation is thought to grow smaller and weaker in the wake of the looming shadow of their exalted past.

Victorian novelists' ahistorical portrayal of Jews creates a paradox when it comes to creating a Jewish nation—how can a nation relying entirely on ancient merits build a modern, successful state in the present? Eliot's depiction of Daniel as similar to the biblical Moses indicates an attempt to fuse past Jewish greatness with contemporary leadership. While Michael Ragussis analyzes Eliot's Jewish nationalist focus as a critique of the ahistorical portrayal of Jews (Ragussis 2, 217), I still find *Daniel Deronda's* concluding emigration to be somewhat problematic. By establishing a direct link between the modern Daniel and his biblical forbears, Eliot still ignores the centuries of Jewish history in between, which have contributed to both English and Jewish national development.

Just as Jews do not necessarily fit clearly into one nationalistic category, women play a shifting role in nationalistic terms. Women in some ways occupied a marginal role in English society, expected to maintain the private, domestic sphere and avoid the public, economic arena. Marilyn Demarest Button attributes the exclusion of women from the public sphere to “restrictive patriarchal systems” (xiv), but in many ways, Victorians viewed women as intrinsically different from men,³⁰ suited to different skills. On one level, women are frequently associated with “people of other races” (Meyer, 7). For instance, many critics focus on the “psychological imperialism” (quoted in Henry, 122) Grandcourt inflicts on Gwendolen in *Daniel Deronda*, a setup that likens Gwendolen to a conquered colony. Lovesey adds that some authors “feminize” foreign countries in order to denigrate them (Button, 122), again associating womanhood with an outsider status. Part of the reason behind the liminal female identity in nationalism is that women can transfer race with marriage, and are thus not completely locked into one nationalistic category. Paradoxically, women are biologically responsible for regenerating the very nations they are excluded from in discourse; Ragussis argues that literature places women “at the heart of a crisis in survival” (Ragussis 2, 12) of national identity. Thus, the evolving definition of “England” in the nineteenth century both excludes women and cannot function without them.³¹

³⁰ Christina Crosby uses the term “radically other” (2) to describe the perceived differences between women and men in the Victorian period.

³¹ While some recent criticism has challenged this stark separate spheres thesis, the majority of research upholds the traditional understanding of the cult of domesticity. One example of the more recent critical approach is Alisa Clapp-Itnyre’s book, *Angelic Airs and Subversive Songs*. Clapp-Itnyre illustrates how music, a staple of the domestic arena, also carried public-sphere economic and political ramifications, showing some interconnections between the two realms of home and work.

While understanding nationalist representations of both Jews and women illuminates the characters I am engaging with, the category of “Jewish woman” is a separate one altogether. At first glance, a reader might expect Jewish woman characters to be “doubly other,” outsiders to English society on the basis of gender and race. The foreign woman is supposed to symbolize “suspect ideology: ‘heathen’ religion and anti-Englishness (Button, 121). The literary results, however, are more complex. As Judith Lewin points out, “the Jewish female figure, or ‘Jewess’ as she was called, symbolizes a tension between past and present, East and West, alien and equal, that disrupts oppositions and destabilizes literary conventions” (1). As I will indicate in the chapters to come, when the categories of Jewishness and femaleness fuse, they almost counteract each other, creating characters who “should” be abject outsiders, but instead come to function as epitomes of English nationalist ideology.

British nationalism figures as a prominent narrative in Victorian novels. In an era of rapid social and political transition, the need for nineteenth century novelists to define the English self, often in contrast to another group, fosters complex and intriguing portrayals of minorities, women, and other groups. Ideas ranging from imperialism to gender labor divisions shape the novels I am studying, and the unique space Jewish woman characters occupy within them. The figure of the Jewess, much like nationalist ideology itself, is not monolithically portrayed. While some Jewish women demonstrate exceptional virtue, others embody the fears of nationalist thinkers—the deviant and foreign woman seeking to deconstruct the concepts underpinning the English sense of self.

One does not love a place the less for having suffered in it,
 unless it has been all suffering, nothing but suffering.
 --Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

Chapter II

The Outsiders: the Story of the Rebellious Jewish Woman

While most of the Jewish woman characters I will explore traverse a thin boundary between insiders and outsiders in British society, two women in particular situate clearly in the realm of "Other." In an era of increased nationalism, Victorian writers endeavoring to create a concept or definition of "Englishness" often did so by first defining the "Other." As Judith Lewin argues, "one way of defining the self is through negation" (1). The foreign woman, an outsider due to both nationality and gender, becomes "doubly Other" (Lovesey) in contrast to the English "self." This conception is limited for many of the characters I will study, but provides a useful lens for studying the figures of Isabel Elveda, the staunch feminist advocate of Walter Besant's *The Rebel Queen*, and the Princess Halm-Eberstein, also known as the Alcharisi, reveals herself as the protagonist's mother in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. These women are not simply marginalized by the texts they appear in because they are both Jewish and women. Rather, they are vilified as examples of *failed* Jewish women, who defect from the responsibilities of their gender and community. These two levels of failure, as Jews and as women, are inextricably tied.

Isabel Elveda and the Alcharisi are outsiders on several levels—from society, from their families, and from the texts they inhabit themselves. Each woman's life choices are unusual for her time—Isabel separates from her husband and pursues a career

as a writer and activist in the women's movement, and the Princess establishes a profession on the stage, abandoning her son and eventually marrying a Christian prince. Alienation, from the Jewish community and their individual families, including husband and children, is a clear element of these women's outsider status. By the time *The Rebel Queen* and *Daniel Deronda* reach their conclusion, each text has "punished" its rebel. Isabel is penniless, "hard and bitter" (388) and remains alone while her husband and child leave England to travel. The Princess, despite her financial stability, describes herself as a "shattered woman" (578) and constantly expresses a desire to relive the past. The Alcharisi's recognition of her own failure is an especially notable instance of the text passing judgment on the atypical decisions made by these two "virago" women.

Isabel and the Princess are alike in their topics of conversation, both delivering moving "feminist manifestos" arguing on behalf of expanded opportunities for women. In the first few pages of *The Rebel Queen*, Isabel asserts, "women, they can meet on equal terms the pick of men; yes, in any science, in scholarship...the woman is as good as the man. I claim no superiority, as other do—equality alone satisfies me" (8). The Princess makes a similarly dramatic declaration: "you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl" (573).

For both women, the "slavery of being a girl" is integrally associated with Judaism—in this manner, Isabel and the Alcharisi's rebellion against traditional ideas of gender and loyalty to one's nationality, in this case Judaism, are not two separate pursuits, but part of a single consideration. Isabel protests the role of "a girl of our People," commenting, "there is obedience. This is the whole of the Law for Woman" (8). The Princess remarks on the divergent rituals for men and women, for example, "men

should bind the *tephillin*³² on them and women not" (572). The Alcharisi goes on to link the expectations of Judaism and femininity: "To have a pattern cut out—this is the Jewish woman, this is what you must be, this is what you are wanted for, a woman's heart must be of such a size and no larger, else it must be pressed small" (573). Thus, given each woman's perspective, Isabel and the Princess's adherence to feminist ideology requires abandoning their Judaism.

Isabel and the Alcharisi's feminist ideals set them at odds with traditional Victorian English notions of femininity, such as the maternal instinct. As part of their rejection of typical concepts of femininity, both women are seen as inaccessible, cold mothers. Isabel's relationship with her daughter, Francesca, is strained throughout the novel before the two ultimately break ties. In addition, while Isabel claims that Francesca is independent, she constantly indoctrinates her with feminist ideology, grooming Francesca to become the next "High Priestess" of her mother's "Cause." In *Daniel Deronda* the Princess is brutally honest about her lack of maternal affection, stating, "I ought to say I felt about you as other women say they feel about their children. I did *not* feel that. I was glad to be freed from you" (570). The narrative voice corroborates this lack of emotion, informing readers that the Princess gazes upon her son "not with any repose of maternal delight" (570), and that she interacts with him "with the manner of a queen rather than of a mother" (599). The Alcharisi's openly expressed anathema to traditional motherhood renders her almost inhuman in her son, Daniel's eyes—he thinks of her as "not quite a human mother, but a Melusina" (567) and compares her to an other-

³² Tephillin, also known as phylacteries, are ritual objects traditionally used by men in Jewish prayer services. Tephillin consist of two boxes containing Biblical passages, connected by leather straps. The wearer wraps the leather straps around his arm and head, placing one box on his wrist and another at the top of his forehead.

worldly “sorceress” (598). Since the Melusina is a mythological half-woman, half-serpent creature, the image both compromises the Princess’ humanity and invokes the Edenic story of the serpent and the fall of woman.

Just as the narratives of Isabel and the Alcharisi demonstrate their departure from traditional femininity in their role as mothers, both use their maternal influence to strengthen their disavowal of Judaism. Both women raise their children ignorant of their Jewish past—Isabel Elveda tells her daughter, Francesca, that they are Spanish Moors, and the Princess gives her two-year-old son to be raised by Sir Hugo Mallinger, in the hopes of making him a British Christian gentleman. Later on, the Princess herself is baptized before she remarries and has more children. Michael Ragussis argues that in Victorian novels, “woman’s central trial is represented as the trial of national, religious, or racial loyalty” (481) because women are progenitors of the race, ensuring its continuity. While Isabel and the Princess both reproduce, their decision to remove their children from Judaism leads them to fail this “central trial” of Jewish national regeneration. In addition, both women are only children in their families of origin, so their choices impact the future of their familial legacies. Significantly, these women are the only two mothers among the Jewish women characters I am studying, which places them in an older age range, no longer fertile and useful to the future of the race. In this manner, femininity, motherhood, and nationality become inextricably connected.

Beyond their lack of maternal instinct, the two virago women compromise their femininity by engaging in the economic world. Both are depicted as materialistic early on in their narratives; Isabel “liked magnificence of all kinds, in dress, in furniture, in art, in carriages” (4) and the Princess exhibits haughty royal airs and “rich bracelets” (566).

For each woman, money is at the root of feminist discourse and cannot coexist with ideal Victorian femininity. In her work, "The Rise of Feminine Authority in the Novel," Nancy Armstrong argues that the cult of domesticity assigns virtue to women because of their separation from the economic world. Applied to Eliot and Besant's novels, Armstrong's theory indicates that Isabel and the Alcharisi's direct involvement with finances lower their virtues. In addition, Isabel's hypocritical ideas on money subvert her "Cause;" for instance, she maintains that the "natural law" requires that "the many must work for the few" (16), even though she opposes the "natural law" that submits women to men. Francesca's protest, "but you are always trying to abolish slavery for women, mother" (17) has a powerful impact on how the reader views Isabel's independence. In the Princess's case, her father's objection that "Jewish women should be thought of by the Christian world as a sort of ware to make singers and actresses of" (573) becomes somewhat true in his daughter's case. While the Princess does not directly indicate inappropriate sexual behavior, her close relationships with male clients, such as Sir Hugo Mallinger, hint of immodesty. On a more serious level, the Alcharisi's career challenges her traditional femininity in that her constant acting renders her unable to feel, a capacity Victorians associated with women. As the narrator informs us, "this woman's nature was one in which all feeling...immediately became a matter of conscious representation: experience immediately passed into drama, and she acted her own emotions" (571).

Isabel and the Princess's engagement in careers allow them to pursue their goals in spite of conservative societal notions, but ultimately destroy that independence. The financial world's betrayal of both women ends up invalidating their feminist ideals. Isabel, a wealthy heiress, loses all her money through a manager's duplicity. She

immediately abandons the Cause and turns to the Jewish community for support. The Alcharisi does not lose her money itself, but her vehicle for self-support, when she “beg[ins] to sing out of tune” (580). Just as Isabel returns to the nation she abandoned, the Princess repeatedly expresses regret over the past. In a notably submissive gesture, the Princess comments, “perhaps now I have satisfied my father’s will” (581). The fact that both women discard their feminist beliefs as soon as they lose their income paints the beliefs themselves in a shallow, self-serving light, associating feminism with the whims of wealthy ladies.

While the many similarities between them allow the Princess and Isabel to be studied together, there are important differences that set the characters apart from one another. In *The Rebel Queen*, the narrative plays a greater role in condemning Isabel Elveda than the character herself, whereas Eliot’s Alcharisi reproves herself far more profoundly than the text itself. Isabel Elveda functions more as a satirical figure in *The Rebel Queen*, set in her own ideas but unable to see them clearly. For instance, Isabel never comments on the potential hypocrisy of championing women while belittling the poor, although even her painfully naïve daughter Francesca ponders the issue. There are also subtler moments where the narrative undermines Isabel. Early in the novel, during Isabel’s marital dispute over women’s roles, the narrator undermines her claim of equality, qualifying, “in her heart she owned [her husband] for her Master; he was her Master in will, her Master in intellect...in one thing only was she his equal—in her pride” (Besant, 11). At another point, the narrator informs the readers that Isabel’s published history of women “was a terrible book to those who had time to read it through” (24). In

Isabel's case, the blatant recognition of her husband greater value makes her choices to escape patriarchal confines seem absurd and pointless.

Unlike Isabel's portrayal, *Daniel Deronda* does not depict the character of Leonora, or the Alcharisi, satirically, but treats her with deadly seriousness. In her critical work, *Greatness Engendered*, Alison Booth comments on the dramatic intensity of the Alcharisi's character: "The Alcharisi's life is an operatic performance, the tragedy of the heroic woman that demands a dying aria" (283). Furthermore, the condemnation of the virago character in *Daniel Deronda* comes from Leonora herself, while the narrator appears somewhat sympathetic to the Princess' situation. Underlying the Princess' portrayal of herself is a sense of self-hatred, both for her Jewish origins and female gender. Describing her upbringing as a Jew, the Alcharisi bitterly comments,

I was to love the long prayers in the ugly synagogue, and the howling, and the gabbling, and the dreadful fasts and tiresome feasts, and my father's endless discoursing about Our People, which was a thunder without meaning in my ears. I was to care for ever about what Israel had been; and I did not care at all. (Eliot, 572)

In addition to loathing Jewish ritual, the narrative depicts the Princess as "female-deficient," as she claims to have "nothing to give" (575) and lacks her gender's "talent to love" (605). The Alcharisi sees herself as gifted with "male genius," but trapped in the narrow confines of a female body. She covers her female body with voluminous black lace, displaying no interest the feminine features she carries.

There are several explanations as to why *The Rebel Queen's* narrator condemns Isabel while the Alcharisi chastises herself. Interestingly, *The Rebel Queen's* author is male, while *Daniel Deronda's* is female; perhaps the gender separation of the era allowed Eliot to paint a slightly more sympathetic portrait of the rebel woman than Besant was

able to. In addition, Booth points out the many biographical similarities between Eliot and the Alcharisi's lives, arguing, "the Alcharisi seems to confess to Eliot's own defiance of her father's religion and of patriarchal law in her [out of wedlock] union with Lewes, and perhaps most importantly to her ambition and love of success" (283). In other words, Eliot and the character she pens are both female artists wrestling with the demands of societal gender notions and creative life.

However, the parallels between Eliot and the Princess beg the question of why the Princess is labeled as an absolute outsider, and is made to suffer so profoundly, in the text. Several critics view the Alcharisi as a sacrificial figure, whose personal unhappiness becomes necessary for a larger benefit. This concept of "collective progress generated by sacrificial 'unhistoric acts'" (Booth, 89) does not provide the suffering figure with any compensation aside from "the resulting incremental progress" (94) the sufferer may not even be aware of. Christina Crosby corroborates this critique in *The Ends of History*, asserting that *Daniel Deronda* forces the individual to submit to the coercive "Invisible Power" of history. Crosby also highlights the particular role of women in advancing historical "progress," claiming, "women must submit...to a higher necessity, that of reproducing social life...Women are thus a medium of transmission, not 'the great Transmitters'" (23-4). In *Daniel Deronda*, the "common good" achieved by sacrificing the Alcharisi is Daniel's ability to be a part of both Jewish and English cultures. In this manner, Daniel resembles the biblical Moses, able to successfully lead due to his connections to both Egyptians and Jews. Just as Moses' mother, Jochebed,

sends her child away on a floating basket in the Nile,³³ the Alcharisi is forced to sacrifice her own happiness in order to give her son the background of a leader.³⁴

Aside from their differences, Isabel and the Alcharisi both exhibit on some level “the phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred and its corollary, the impetus to assimilate and convert” (Ragussis, 506), but neither fully succeeds. Isabel is derisive towards Judaism, dismissing what she views as the “old traditions, your jumble and jargon of ceremonies and superstitions” (11). After separating from her husband, Isabel attempts to enter polite society by claiming Spanish, rather than Jewish descent, but later comments, “We do not belong to society, we are foreigners” (61). The Princess also creates a Christian life for herself, escaping anti-Semitism—“I rid myself of the Jewish tatters and gibberish that make people nudge each other at the sight of us” (576)—but is ultimately unhappy in her choice. Furthermore, Daniel’s eventual commitment to Jewish causes thwarts the Princess’s desire to have her son become an Englishman. Ironically, in Isabel and the Princess’ attempts to assimilate and become insiders in society, they instead become distinct outsiders. The two women’s choice to abandon traditional ideas of womanhood and their religion of origin incurs strong disapproval from the social worlds they inhabit, and the texts that create them.

Isabel and the Alcharisi are unusual among the female Jewish characters in the novels I am studying in that they are the most clearly “outside” the realm of what ideal “Englishness” should constitute. These are perhaps the portrayals one might expect to

³³ This story appears in Exodus, Chapter 2. After concealing her son for three months, Moses’ mother “took a papyrus box, coating it with asphalt and pitch, and she placed the child in it. She placed it in the rushes near the bank of the Nile” (2:3).

³⁴ By having experience with both Jewish and British society, Daniel is uniquely suited to furthering Jewish causes, just as Moses was able to aid Jewish slaves due to his proximity to Pharaoh.

find, treating Jewish women in an anti-Semitic, antagonistic light. Isabel and the Princess demonstrate the “road not taken,” leaving a clear example for the generation to follow, who tread the line between “inside” and “outside” in a more complex way. By modeling the wrong kind of assimilation, the wrong views of womanhood, and the wrong lifestyle choices, Isabel and Princess set a precedent for the Jewish woman characters I will focus on in the pages to come.

I never heard a passion so confus'd,
 So strange, outrageous, and so variable
 As the dog Jew did utter in the streets.
 "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
 Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
 Justice! The law! My ducats, and my daughter!"
 --*The Merchant of Venice*, II.viii.12-17

Chapter III

Of Money and Morals: Economics, Femininity and Jewish Womanhood

Given the negative images of both Jews and women in the Victorian period, a reader might expect the Jewish women of nineteenth century literature to be paradigms of negative nationalist and feminine qualities.³⁵ On the contrary, however, the Jewish women I am studying embody the ideal of the British woman, often in contrast to their female Christian counterparts. The characters of Mirah, Francesca, Rebecca of York, and Sarah Oppovich fulfill the qualities of British womanhood by engaging in economic activities in particular ways, all the while maintaining their femininity. Retaining the Victorian period's image of womanhood while participating in an increasingly industrialized economic world allows Jewish woman characters to gain the status of paragons of virtue in the novels they inhabit.

The economic storylines of Jewish woman characters can function as literary revisions of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. While Shakespeare wrote his play over two centuries before Sir Walter Scott, the earliest author of the novels I am focusing on, the characters of Shylock and his daughter, Jessica, perform implicit, but significant,

³⁵ This ties to the idea of foreign women being "doubly Other," which appears in Oliver Lovesey's essay on "Tigresses, Tinsel Madonnas, and Citizens of the World: The "Other" Woman in George Eliot's Fiction."

roles in Victorian portrayals of “the Jewess.” Michael Ragussis emphasizes Shylock’s legacy for later literary Jews, arguing, “Shylock perennially holds the English imagination in thrall” (Ragussis 2, 60) and labeling *Merchant of Venice* “the ur-text of Jewish identity in England” (Ragussis 2, 118). Economics play a vital role in Shylock’s character; it is his practice of usury and insatiable avarice that create Shylock’s villainy. Although Jessica redeems herself by abandoning her father and joining the Christian community, her own economic activities do not speak well for her character—Jessica’s theft of her father’s casket of jewels inspires his grief and contributes to his ruin, and her alleged sale of her mother’s heirloom ring for a monkey implies a callous nature. The Jewish women of Victorian novels rewrite the character of Jessica in an indirect manner.³⁶ For instance, several critics³⁷ comment on the silver casket Rebecca of York gives to Rowena, comparing it to the famed silver casket of the *Merchant of Venice*. However, while the Jewish women I am examining echo the economic anxiety of Shakespeare’s work, they rewrite its story, creating new Jewish woman models to replace the ever-present Jessica.

The Victorian era’s economic structure bore little resemblance of that of Shakespeare’s, resulting in different conceptions of gender roles. The nineteenth century saw several important moments in England’s industrialization, from the first railway steam engine, which debuted in Wales in 1804, to the Great Exhibition of 1851, in which cutting-edge technological innovations were displayed to the public. The opening of the

³⁶ Another example of Victorian literature’s focus on *The Merchant of Venice* is Maria Edgeworth’s *Harrington*, in which characters respond to theatrical representations of Shylock (Ragussis 2, 11).

³⁷ These critics include Michael Ragussis, who discusses the casket in his book, *Figures of Conversion*, and Judith Lewin.

Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825 was a further instance of the rapid changes in England's technological and economic systems.³⁸ In addition to new machinery, England's capitalist economy led to new perceptions of wealth, shifting from a land-oriented understanding of wealth to an emphasis on money, regardless of land ownership (Cahn, 23). Nancy Armstrong connects economic shifts with evolving ideas about gender and sexuality, claiming, "men and women...thought of sexuality in a way peculiarly adapted to the dynamics of social life as shaped by the British economy (129). While women had played a vital role in the agricultural economy, contributing the subsistence household, the rise of paid labor took work outside the home and lessened a woman's involvement in the family's income production. Eventually, these changes led to the ideology of separate spheres, in which women occupied the domestic arena, while men engaged in the public, capitalist world.³⁹ Women were charged with separating "the domestic world from the competitive interaction prevailing among men" (Armstrong, 130). According to this social structure, women embodied the ideal of femininity in the home, while men engaged in economic and capitalist activities.

The domestic ideology prevailing in the Victorian period assigned certain attributes to the ideal woman, allowing her to successfully fulfill her housewifely feminine role. Susan Cahn quotes period definitions of the qualities necessary for a Victorian wife, including a "kind and courteous disposition," "a meek and quiet spirit," and "cheerful countenance" (146). In addition, a certain level of timidity (Cahn, 77) or

³⁸ James Foreman-Peck describes the importance of the steam engine and railway in changing the British economy.

³⁹ This general account of the changes in economics and women's roles is adapted from Susan Cahn's *Industry of Devotion: the Transformation of Women's Work in England, 1500-1660*. While Cahn focuses on a much earlier period, her observations provide a useful backdrop for understanding the Victorian ideology of domesticity.

modesty was valued in the Victorian conception of ideal femininity. Furthermore, materialism was a negative feminine attribute, since under the ideology of separate spheres wives became an economic drain on their spouses, rather than an economic contributor, as they had been in the agricultural economy (Cahn 146). Thus, a materialistic wife would lower her husband's economic status, but a woman with a large dowry could raise his finances by transferring her property to him.

Mirah, Rebecca, Sarah, and Francesca all embody the ideal qualities of the Victorian woman, from non-materialism to general "feminine" weakness or vulnerability. Mirah Lapidoth, the young Jewish woman whom Daniel Deronda rescues from near-suicide and eventually marries, demonstrates feminine vulnerability and a modest mien throughout George Eliot's novel. The reader's first introduction to Mirah, as she almost drowns in a river, constructs her in a decidedly girlish manner:

Deronda...saw at a few yards' distance from him a figure which might have been an impersonation of the misery he was unconsciously giving voice to: a girl hardly more than eighteen, of low slim figure, with the most delicate little face.... she changed her attitude slightly, and, looking round with a frightened glance, met Deronda's face. It was but a couple of moments, but that seems a long time for two people to look straight at each other. Her look was something like that of a fawn or other gentle animal before it turns to run away: no blush, no special alarm, but only some timidity...[Daniel began] to justify himself for feeling sorrow was the more tragic when it befell delicate, childlike beauty. (Eliot, 167)

This passage continually emphasizes Mirah's "delicate" appearance, using the term twice, also pointing out her "timidity" and "frightened glance." Furthermore, the narrative voice compares Mirah with symbols of weakness and helplessness such as a baby deer, "gentle animal," or child. The virtuous, demure Mirah maintains these sorts

of qualities throughout *Daniel Deronda*, at one point described as “perfect”(Eliot, 495) by the man to later become her husband. Critic Ellen B. Rosenman ascribes an “exaggerated and emblematic femininity” (252) to Mirah, viewing her as a “mirror” (252) who reflects others’ identities rather than constructing her own. While I do not entirely agree with Rosenman’s assessment, Mirah’s character is certainly a model of exemplary Victorian womanhood.

Like Mirah, Rebecca of York provides a prominent example of feminine characteristics. According to Michael Ragussis, Mirah was in some ways modeled on Rebecca of York (Ragussis 2, 60), highlighting the numerous similarities between them. Just as Mirah is the ideal moral woman of *Daniel Deronda*, Rebecca functions as a “paragon of virtue” (Rosenberg, 75) in *Ivanhoe*, Sir Walter Scott’s 1819 historical novel. Despite facing extreme trials, such as a near-rape by Knight Templar Brian de-Bois Guilbert and a death threat from King John, Rebecca protects her faith, as well as her sexual chastity. Unlike her money-hungry father, Isaac of York, Rebecca refuses to be swayed by materialistic offers, such as the frequent promises of future wealth de-Bois Guilbert offers.

In Charles Lever’s *That Boy of Norcott’s*, the love interest of the protagonist, Digby, is a Jewish woman named Sarah Oppovich. While Sarah is initially depicted as rather unladylike, as the novel runs its course, Sarah becomes closely associated with feminine traits, resembling Mirah and Rebecca. Mrs. Norcott, Digby’s mother, refers to Sarah as “that good girl who, caring nothing for herself, gave her heart and soul to the service of her father” (617), emphasizing Sarah’s selflessness, a quality of the ideal Victorian woman. On a more general level, Sarah’s tale, like Mirah’s, is a rescue story—

despite Sarah's initial show of strength, she ultimately proves in need of saving by the hero, the classic "damsel in distress."

Francesca Elveda, the heroine of Walter Besant's 1893 novel, *The Rebel Queen*, follows her Jewish literary counterparts in providing an example of ideal femininity. Like Sarah Oppovich, Francesca's first appearances in the novel are less than feminine—raised by Isabel, a feminist activist, the young Francesca performs in a dramatic play exalting women's freedom. Even in such surroundings, Francesca manages to develop an aura of femininity. Harold, Francesca's Christian admirer, describes her as "dainty and ethereal," no less than a "simple maiden of Paradise" (Besant, 62). Even Francesca's manner of speaking connects her to an ideal British image, since unlike her decidedly foreign mother Isabel, Francesca "spoke English perfectly" (Besant, 14). Francesca's language skills and ideal womanly traits combine to fulfill a British nationalist ideal of the perfect woman. By the close of the novel, Francesca's devotion to her father mirrors Sarah Oppovich's, and her feminine submissiveness is overt and dramatic. Before leaving for a trip with her father, Francesca beseeches her fiancée Harold, "suffer me to be with my father—my own father—a little longer. Oh, you cannot tell what a happiness it is to hear his voice, only to serve him and to obey him!" (Besant, 389). Thus, feminine submission becomes Francesca's hallmark.

Not only do Jewish woman characters exemplify Victorian feminine traits, they ironically embody ideal womanhood more than their female Christian counterparts. In many of the novels, the Jewesses serve as role models for Christian ladies. George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* puts Mirah Lapidoth on a figurative pedestal above Gwendolen Harleth. While both women face financial difficulties, Mirah reacts with equanimity

while Gwendolen treats her family members and suitors with disdain. At the novel's close, Gwendolen resolves to become "one of the best of women" (736), a status Mirah, in her apparent perfection, has already achieved. Furthermore, Daniel has the option to marry either Gwendolen or Mirah and selects the latter, demonstrating her superiority. The narrator also places Mirah above her Christian hosts, the Meyrick family. Mab Meyrick recognizes her own inferiority, bemoaning, "I wish I were not such a hideous Christian. How can an ugly Christian, who is always dropping her work, convert a beautiful Jewess, who has not a fault?" (325). Mirah clearly outdoes her Christian counterparts in emulating their own religious values.

While Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* sets its Jewish and Christian heroines on more equal footing, Rebecca of York still triumphs over Rowena in subtle, but significant, ways. *Ivanhoe* ultimately chooses the Saxon Rowena as a bride, but the text emphasizes that his choice was not completely heartfelt:

He lived long and happily with Rowena, for they were attached to each other by the bonds of early affection, and the loved each other the more from the recollection of the obstacles which had impeded their union. Yet it would be inquiring too curiously to ask whether the recollection of Rebecca's beauty and magnanimity did not recur to his mind more frequently than the fair descendant of Alfred might altogether have approved. (Scott, 520)

Rebecca's beauty and virtue did not only make an impression on the character of *Ivanhoe*; numerous contemporary readers of *Ivanhoe* critiqued Scott's assignation of the happy ending to Rowena. William Makepeace Thackeray went as far as to rewrite Scott's tale, killing off Rowena and reuniting Rebecca and *Ivanhoe*.⁴⁰ In addition, at one

⁴⁰ This short novel is entitled "Rebecca and Rowena: A Romance Upon Romance," by William Makepeace Thackeray

point in the text, Rebecca hands a silver casket of jewels to Rowena as a wedding gift, seemingly as a gesture of goodwill. Judith Lewin adds an insightful reading, viewing Rebecca's "gift" as a transference of materialism and worldliness to Rowena, leaving herself the more virtuous in the process (Lewin 3, 2). Rebecca's comments in this passage support Lewin's interpretation—upon bestowing the casket, Rebecca declares, "Think ye that I prize these sparkling fragments of stone above my liberty? Or that my father values them in comparison to the honor of his only child?"⁴¹ Accept them, lady—to me they are valueless. I will never wear jewels more" (Scott, 519). Rebecca's rejection of materialism connects to her display of both Christian and feminine virtue.

That Boy of Norcott's also elevates its Jewess, Sarah Oppovich, above other Christian characters. In Lever's novel, however, this is not immediately apparent but a lengthy process in which Digby, the protagonist, learns to distinguish true femininity and virtue from mere counterfeit. Throughout the early part of the text, Digby reveres Madame Cleremont, a sophisticated lady trapped in a loveless marriage who shows Digby kindness while his own father neglects him. While Digby views Mme Cleremont as a bastion of ideal womanhood, she eventually proves to be of the opposite composition, at one point even attempting to murder Digby for financial gain. Digby's realization of Mme Cleremont's falsehood forces him to reconsider his models of femininity:

All the winning softness of her manner, all those engaging coquetries of look and gesture...were gone, and another and a very different nature had replaced them. This, then,

⁴¹ This statement of Rebecca's constitutes a direct contrast to the character of Shylock, and in particular the speech quoted in the epigraph of this chapter. In this manner, Rebecca's comment supports theories of *Ivanhoe* being a response to, or revision of, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.

was one of those women all tenderness and softness and fascination, but who behind this mask have the fierce nature of the tigress. (Lever, 612)

Just as Mme Cleremont's defection highlights Sarah's comparative virtue, Digby also contrasts Sarah to Pauline, a former object of his admiration. Pauline's character is never really developed, but towards the end of the novel, Digby receives news of her disfigurement, further identifying Sarah as the most worthy and beautiful of the novel's female characters.

Sarah, Mirah, and Rebecca of York all tower over their Gentile counterparts in displaying their femininity; however, Jewish women come across as ideal Christians in some surprising ways in these texts. Rebecca of York symbolically rejects materialism by donating the casket of jewels to Rowena; she also chooses a celibate lifestyle and devotion to community service acts, such as "tending the sick, feeding the hungry, and relieving the distressed (519). Judith Lewin points out that Rebecca's abandonment of material wealth in fact demonstrates a Christian, not Jewish, value (Lewin 3, 3). Rowena herself views Rebecca's choices as similar to a nun's life, inquiring, "have you then convents, to one of which you mean to retire?" (Scott, 519). Like Rebecca, Francesca Elveda is compared to a pious Christian, apparently "innocent as a nun" (Besant, 78) despite her worldly upbringing.⁴² In Eliot's novel, guests at a concert similarly describe Mirah Lapidoth as "demure as a nun" (506). Ironically, these Jewesses are likened to nuns far more than the Christian women who also appear in the same novels.

In addition to triumphing over Christian women in virtue, the Jewish women in nineteenth century novels provide much more complimentary portraits than Jewish male

⁴² Francesca eventually marries a Christian man, Harold, in addition to embodying Christian-like values.

characters, largely for economic reasons. Nineteenth-century novels closely link their male Jewish characters to negative capitalist stereotypes. For instance, Mirah's father exploits his daughter and nearly sells her into prostitution, Isaac of York focuses on money with an intensity reminiscent of Shylock, and Francesca's Jewish relative, Angelo's, home contains an "atmosphere of money-getting" (Besant, 80). While Sarah Oppovich's "thrifty" (Lever, 535) father presents a less dramatic example, she has a brother, who after being "led into evil" (579) later ruins the family fortune.

Edgar Rosenberg points out that for the Jewish character, money is central and "almost bound to be at the root of his problem" (262). Derek Penslar uses the term "economic anti-Semitism" (12) to encapsulate the links between anti-Jewish prejudice and economic anxiety. In the industrial economy of the nineteenth century, popular literature depicted Jews as extreme capitalists, the subject of societal anxieties about capitalism in general (Penslar, 16) and its conflicting demands with virtuous behavior. Digby, the hero of *That Boy of Norcott's* dramatically describes Jews as "warriors of commerce" (Lever, 540). Writers contrasted the extreme economic individualism thought to apply to Jews (Endelman, 97) to the classic British Protestant work ethic (Endelman, 102), which combined labor and virtue.

Regardless of their wealth or lack thereof, Jewish men were in an economic conundrum. Poor Jewish men shared the stigma heaped on poverty in general (Foreman 182), and Jewish peddlers were accused of monopolizing street trade (Endelman, 180). However, wealthy Jews were treated with perhaps more disdain. Efforts made by some

Jews to advance and become English gentlemen⁴³ were greeted with contempt, as evidenced by Anthony Trollope's treatment of the Jewish merchant Mr. Melmotte in his 1875 novel *The Way We Live Now*. Aristocratic neighbors treat the wealthy Melmotte with disdain, ridiculing him because "he did not yet quite understand the bearing and sequence of English titles" (Trollope, 39). Jewish businesses also faced their peers' fears of competition (Penslar, 16), which often led to Jewish financial conspiracy theories. For instance, pamphlet writers denounced the Jewish Naturalization Bill of 1753, popularly dubbed "the Jew Bill," as a money-gaining ploy by Sephardic merchants.⁴⁴ *That Boy of Norcott's* provides a literary example of a conspiracy theory, supposedly involving Sarah Oppovich's father's firm—" [Digby's friend] made it appear that from one end of Europe to the other the whole financial system was in the hands of a few crafty men of immense wealth, who unthroned dynasties, and controlled the fate of nations, with a word" (Lever, 574). Digby himself internalizes this anti-Semitic stereotype, wondering to himself, "was then the Hebrew heart bent solely on gain?" (588). Digby's response articulates the Victorian era's pervasive fear of the Jews' supposed economic aggression.

Victorian literature frequently portrays the Jewess of virtuously in contrast to Jewish male figures, in a large part due to her separation from the economic realm. Just as period anxieties about the negative effects of capitalism were channeled into economic stereotypes about Jews, women also played a role in maintaining societal morality versus the aggressive individualism of the capitalist economy. Within the domestic sphere, British society charged women with providing "a sanctuary from commerce"

⁴³ Todd Endelman describes Jewish upward mobility in his historical text, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714-1830*.

⁴⁴ Several scholars comment on the Jewish Naturalization Bill, including Todd Endelman, Derek Penslar, and Michael Ragussis.

(Nunokawa, 142), a haven for men to escape the industrial world outside. Period thinkers viewed women as inherently “noncompetitive, non-aggressive, and self-sacrificing” (quoted in Dolin, 7), ideally economically passive. As scholar Tim Dolin demonstrates, the image of a submissive, selfless woman was at odds with the ability to act self-interestedly that money provided (8). Thus, Jewish women escaped the censure heaped on their fathers and brothers by maintaining distance from economic activities and the moral taint thought to accompany them.

However, Jewish women’s separation from the economic realm is not definitive or clear-cut. Seemingly, to become such models of ideal womanhood, Jewish woman characters would necessarily be economically passive, conforming to period expectations. On the contrary, Mirah, Rebecca, Francesca, and Sarah all engage with the financial world to some degree. Mirah has been trained in opera and earns her keep at the Meyricks by performing for Deronda’s acquaintances. Throughout the novel, Mirah’s vocal performances set the backdrop for many dramatic scenes. Rebecca of York is not formally employed, but frequently advises her father on business transactions. In addition, Rebecca transfers goods several times in the novel, be it the donation of money to ransom Richard II, or the casket she gives to Rowena at *Ivanhoe*’s conclusion. Rebecca’s medicinal skill, while not a financial enterprise for her, did provide income for other medically practicing Jews of her era, as Scott’s narrator indicates (296). Finally, many scholars, including Judith Lewin, trace the inspiration for Rebecca of York’s character to Rebecca Gratz, a single philanthropist who was powerful in the economic world (Lewin 2,186). Like Rebecca, Sarah Oppovich assists her father in his business, earning her a reputation as “proud and insolent” (Lever, 529). Finally, Francesca begins

her life in a wealthy, materialistic home. Even after Francesca breaks ties with her mother, and the feminism and materialism Isabel represents, Francesca constantly engages in economic discussions with the men around her. In this manner, economics provide a vital underlying narrative in the stories of these Jewish women.

The often extensive economic involvement of the Jewesses beg an important question—if these women defy the separation of spheres so vital to the Victorian domestic ideology, how are they portrayed as such paragons of virtue? Upon a deeper examination, the Jewish woman characters' financial efforts are not randomly chosen, but conducted in such a way as to maintain their femininity despite the allegedly sullyng effects of capitalism. On one level, the stories of these women demonstrate the threats of economic involvement, constituting a compelling example for impressionable female readers. In part by functioning as “victim[s] of economic pressures” (Rosenberg, 263),⁴⁵ Jewish women are able to both engage in financial activities and encompass the attributes of Victorian femininity. Mirah Lapidoth presents the most powerful instance of the dangers of capitalist involvement for women. During Mirah's childhood, her father exploits and objectifies her in exchange for money. Mirah recalls, “it was painful that he boasted of me, and set me to sing for show at any minute, as if I had been a musical box”(Eliot, 188). Mirah's comparison to a music box is telling, as in her role as a musician she is limited to a mere object. This commoditization reappears to a lesser extent when Mirah performs in Daniel's circle. While she performs, the guests scrutinize her body, commenting to Daniel, “Your Jewess is pretty—there's no denying that” (Eliot

⁴⁵ Rosenberg applies this phrase to Mr. Riah, one of Dickens' positively portrayed Jewish characters. However, I believe the concept can accurately apply to the function of the Jewess in the nineteenth-century literature.

506). Mirah's exploitation in the economic realm defines her standards of who to trust—upon first meeting Daniel in the river, she fearfully asks him, "Do you belong to the theater?" (Eliot, 170) before agreeing to accompany him to the Meyrick's home.

Albeit on a less dramatic scale, Rebecca, Sarah, and Francesca each demonstrate the threats of the economic world. Rebecca's sole marketable skill, her medicinal ability, almost leads to her death. When the evil King John accuses Rebecca of using sorcery to capture the attentions of Sir Brian de-Bois Guilbert, medicine plays a role in the trial.⁴⁶ The cultural anxiety about Jewish medicine that Rebecca inspires recalls the case of Rodrigo Lopez, a converted Jew and Queen Elizabeth's personal physician who was arrested for treason and subsequently executed on June 7, 1594.⁴⁷ For Sarah Oppovich, the danger of a woman engaging in finance is less physical than social; even Digby, who becomes Sarah's husband, views her business involvement as denigrating to her femininity. Digby's monologue about Sarah indicates the deep intertwining of economics and the Victorian feminine ideal:

These were not the natures I had read of in Balzac! The creatures all passion and soul and sentiment—women whose atmosphere was positive enchantment, and whose least glance or word or gesture would inflame the heart to very madness; and yet, was it not in Sara to become all this? Were those deep lustrous eyes, that looked into space longingly, dreamfully, dazingly—were they meant to pore over wearisome columns of dry arithmetic, or not rather to give back in recognition what they had got in rapture, and to look as they were looked into? (Lever, 588)

⁴⁶ King John recruits one of Rebecca's former patients to testify he had been "cured of the palsy by a Jewish damsel" (Scott, 419), implying witchcraft or sorcery.

⁴⁷ Although the Lopez execution occurred centuries before Scott wrote his novel, the case held a prominent place in the English imagination. In addition, many scholars trace connections between Lopez's trial and Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, the play *Ivanhoe* frequently alludes to.

According to Digby's assessment, Sarah's occupation with "wearisome columns of dry arithmetic" prevents her from giving affection, let alone possessing the "positive enchantment" of Balzac's feminine heroines. For Digby, economics and ideal Victorian womanhood are not only conflicting, but in fact, mutually exclusive. Finally, Francesca's story also evokes the threats of the economic world to femininity. Francesca's father, Emanuel, describes the ancient Judean desert as a place devoid of capitalist competition, the same location where a woman "only knows her tent, the Desert, and the stars—and the will of her husband" (Besant, 158).⁴⁸

Beyond demonstrating the dangers of economic activity for women, the Jewesses I am studying interact with finances in very specific ways that maintain their virtuousness despite the taint of engaging with money. Mirah Lapidoth deliberately chooses to earn money with music, a career believed to have the doubled ability to cure and cause social ills (Clapp-Itnyre, xvii). As Delia da Sousa Correa phrases it,

Music was the most spiritual and most sensual of the arts; it offered unique advantages for domestic life but also dangerous distraction from home duties...[Music] was an agent of social progress and a cause of sexual havoc. (60)

When used in a positive manner, music was a sign of high human development⁴⁹ (da Sousa Correa, 7), but such talent could be "perverted" if removed from the domestic arena (da Sousa Correa, 66). Since music was imbued with both positive and negative

⁴⁸ Emanuel associates urbanization with the loss of female domesticity and obedience. Ironically, however, many scholars argue that the idealization of domesticity only took hold amid the increasing industrialization and urbanization of the capitalist economy.

⁴⁹ The evolutionary superiority music supposedly proved presents an interesting contrast to the ahistorical and anti-evolutionary lens through which English literary works view the Jews. In this case, Mirah's musical talent implies unusual developmental superiority. In her study on *George Eliot, Music, and Victorian Culture*, da Sousa Correa draws further connections between musical talent and period evolutionary ideas, such as Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection.

meanings, Mirah's ability to navigate the field correctly ensures her virtue. As the singer herself metaphorically relates, "I chose what seemed to me beautiful out of the plays and everything, and made my world out of it" (Eliot, 188). Scholar Oliver Lovesey echoes Mirah's sentiment by commenting that she is impressively "uncontaminated by the theatrical life to which her father has consigned her" (123). Mirah works as a musician under specific conditions, which allow her to retain her ideal femininity. First of all, Mirah chooses music as a way to earn income because "I would rather get my bread in that way than by anything more public" (Eliot, 440). Da Sousa Correa confirms that in the Victorian period, "under particular conditions, musical performance was more easily condoned than other kinds of public appearance for women" (92). Mirah also displays feminine vulnerability despite her talent—the text emphasizes that her voice is weak, unsuited for "great tasks" or "high roofs" (Eliot, 440). In addition, Mirah performs for private parties, not theaters, and wears a plain, dark-colored dress (Eliot, 444). Finally, Mirah leaves her musical career after marrying Deronda (Clapp-Itnyre, 138), demonstrating that working was simply a necessary evil until she could be financially supported. Therefore, Mirah's musical work is conducted in a particular way, leaving her as much a paragon of virtue at the close of the novel as she is at *Daniel Deronda's* opening.

Rebecca of York balances finances with femininity in a similar manner as Mirah. Rebecca uses her access to her father's funds for good causes, such as Richard II's ransom and Ivanhoe's healing. Furthermore, when Isaac of York complains about his financial losses, Rebecca turns the discussion to one of national identity:

"O, Jacob!" he exclaimed—"O, all ye twelve Holy Fathers of our tribe! What a losing venture is this for one

who hath duly kept every jot and title of the law of Moses!
Fifty zecchins wrenched from me at one clutch, and by the
talons of a tyrant!"

"But, Father," said Rebecca, "you seemed to give
the gold to Prince John willingly."

"Willingly! The blotch of Egypt upon him!
Willingly, saidst thou? Ay, as willingly when, in the Gulf
of Lyons, I flung over my merchandise to lighten the ship,
while she labored in the tempest—robed the seething
billows in my choice silks—perfumed their briny foam
with myrrh and aloes—enriched their caverns with gold
and silver work! And was not that an hour of unutterable
misery, though my own hands made the sacrifice?"

"But it was a sacrifice which Heaven exacted to
save our lives," answered Rebecca, "and the G-d of our
fathers has since blessed your store and your gettings."
(Scott, 112-113)

By turning Isaac's complaints into an opportunity to invoke religious concepts, Rebecca demonstrates her ability to infuse the economic activities around her with an element of virtue.

Like Rebecca, Sarah Oppovich plays a major role in her father's business, but uses her power to help the story's hero. Sarah helps Digby, her father's employee, rise in the company hierarchy. Eventually, Digby receives a major promotion that "was Sarah's doing" (Lever, 552). Sarah also emphasizes her own feminine weaknesses, describing herself as "a young girl, little versed in business, but self-confident and presumptuous" (Lever, 578). Viewing her own talents as "unequal" (574) to the challenge of navigating her father's business through a financial crisis, Sarah places the success of her father's company in Digby's hands. Throughout the scene where Sarah reveals the family's dire straits, her stereotypically feminine behavior surfaces—at one point, "her courage gave way, and she turned and hid her face, but her convulsed shoulders showed how her emotion was overcoming her" (Lever, 581). Eventually, Sarah loses her father's wealth,

leaving her vulnerable, “pale and sad” (634) and ripe for being rescued by Digby, who has recently inherited a large estate.

Francesca Elveda participates in economic discussions in *The Rebel Queen*, but shows her virtuous nature by siding with the economic ideas lauded by the book’s heroes. At the novel’s opening, Francesca’s mother Isabel demonstrates her flawed nature by purporting tyrannical economic ideas:

Originally, when we all had to go hunting for the daily food, the strong man let the weak man catch the deer, and then killed him for it. In the course of time this method was found to be a waste of material. So the strong man left off killing the weak man and made a slave of him instead. Then the slave hunted for his master every day. The same thing continues to the present day, and always will continue. Now and then the strong become weak, and are in their turn enslaved. Most of the people you see [in the street] are weak; consequently they have to spend their lives making money for their masters. (Besant, 17)

Regardless of any historical basis for this argument, Isabel’s stark utilitarian view of the lower classes presents a distinct contrast to the egalitarian economic ideas put forth by the “positive” characters in the novel, who protest “the Tyranny of the Man who has the Bag” (331). Francesca herself chooses to leave her mother’s luxurious London lodgings and join “the Common Lot” (Besant, 369), residing with a working-class family for a period. *The Rebel Queen* ideologically pits capitalism against a host of “virtuous” pursuits, among them art, science, religion, and traditional definitions of womanhood.⁵⁰ Thus, while Francesca’s participation in male economic conversations would seem

⁵⁰ These binaries appear throughout Besant’s *The Rebel Queen*, but are expressed with particular clarity on page 136.

inappropriate, her staunch support for the “right” opinion⁵¹ renders her a classically feminine Victorian woman.

Beyond Mirah, Francesca, Sarah, and Rebecca’s actual involvement with money, economics play a more indirect role in their stories, well. First of all, financial concepts and language appear throughout literary discussions of the marriage market, which figures prominently in Eliot, Scott, Besant, and Lever’s novels. In each text, marriage is the ultimate goal of the Jewish protagonist, and only Rebecca of York does not succeed in obtaining a mate. Historian Susan Cahn argues that given the reduced options for women to earn independent income, women needed to attract men, who would financially provide for them (140), a situation that could lead to competition between women. This narrative is especially clear in the case of *Daniel Deronda*’s Gwendolen Harleth, whose story begins with a financial dilemma. Unable to pursue any careers besides those of a singer or governess, and lacking the talent for the former and desire for the latter, Gwendolen resolves to marry quickly. In her pursuit of the wealthy Mr. Grandcourt, Gwendolen faces competition from Lydia Glasher, Mr. Grandcourt’s mistress. Gwendolen uses financial terminology to describe her battle with Lydia and fear of “robbing” (Eliot, 635) Mrs. Glasher by marrying Grandcourt. Describing romantic conquests or failures as “gains” or “losses,” Gwendolen clearly articulates the need for capital underlying many romantic plotlines. The theme of competition is also

⁵¹ Interestingly, Francesca does support the wealth of the landed gentry (Besant, 271), but not capitalist gains. In this manner, the text does not condemn wealth in general, but rather the newer economic order shifting away from an emphasis on land ownership.

highly visible in Scott's *Ivanhoe*, as Rebecca and Rowena compete for Ivanhoe's affection, and are juxtaposed and compared by the text in the process.⁵²

Even after a marriage, economics play a role in the couple's union. In *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen's choice of a husband resembles a gamble, symbolized by a roulette game Gwendolen participates in during the novel's opening scene. Gwendolen's gamble on the cold Mr. Grandcourt fails miserably, leaving her both emotionally and fiscally bankrupt. Gwendolen's unfortunate example renders Mirah's choice of the kind Daniel Deronda even wiser in comparison, and illustrates the potential pitfalls Victorian women faced when selecting a mate. Marriage was also a source of transferring funds, rendering women "mediums of exchange" (Rosenman, 238) according to some historians. In Besant's *The Rebel Queen*, Jewish businessman Angelo fears Francesca's potential intermarriage because it will take her fortune out of Jewish hands (166). Thus, capital is both a literal part of marriage as well as an overriding metaphor.

Finally, the links between economic language and marriage in *Daniel Deronda*, *Ivanhoe*, *The Rebel Queen*, and *That Boy of Norcott's* lead to larger thematic issues of legacy and transmission, both financial and cultural. According to Judith Lewin,⁵³ *Ivanhoe's* Rebecca represents purely cultural transmission, since as a Jew Rebecca's family owns no land to hand down to their progeny. Ivanhoe and Rowena, however, own land, and it is this real estate ownership that renders the nationalist idea of England into a physical reality. According to Lewin, Scott fears that British nationalism focuses too

⁵² On many occasions, Rebecca and Rowena appear in similar situations, allowing the reader to compare each woman's behavior. For instance, evil knights hold both women captive in a castle at the same time.

⁵³ Lewin elucidates these concepts in her essay, "Jewish Heritage and Secular Inheritance in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*."

much on capital legacy, neglecting the cultural values that must be passed on to maintain a national identity. Thus, Rebecca's contribution of cultural heritage in the novel, along with the physical space of Ivanhoe's England, creates an ultimate nationalist legacy for England.

The Jewess of nineteenth century literature achieves her status as an ideal British woman by interacting with economics in a socially acceptable manner. By choosing the right career, using her funds for the appropriate causes, or reminding the men around her of behavioral standards as they engage in the economic realm, the Jewish woman of the Victorian novel is at once economically active and virtuous. Not only do Mirah, Rebecca, Sarah, and Francesca avoid the potential dangers of the economic realm, they imbue their families with a strong sense of virtue, both religious and national. Mostly, these characters are expert at navigating a cultural terrain that is in fact foreign to them, achieving remarkable success despite their societal marginality.

And the king loved Esther more than all the women,
and she won more of his grace and favor than all the other girls,
so that he set the royal crown upon her head and made her Queen instead of
Vashti... Esther still told nothing of her kindred or her people as Mordechai had
instructed her; for Esther continued to obey Mordechai.

--*The Scroll of Esther*, II.17-20

Chapter IV

"The Beautiful Daughter of Zion:"⁵⁴ Sexuality, Marriage, and the Female Jewish Body

In the realm of sexual behavior, spousal selection, and procreation, Jewish women once again figure as paragons of ideal femininity and, ironically, Englishness. Francesca, Mirah, Rebecca of York, and Sarah Oppovich all fulfill the expectations of the ideal British woman, but do so in complex ways. The prominence of the intermarriage plot in the novels I am studying showcases the importance assigned to the fictional Jewish woman's choice of a mate, while each character's decisions vary significantly. The narratives of *Daniel Deronda*, *Ivanhoe*, *That Boy of Norcott's*, and *The Rebel Queen* also treat their Jewesses in overtly sexual terms, exposing some of the ideological contradictions underlying Victorian notions of womanhood, race, and domesticity.

The stories of Jewish women in Victorian fiction contain doubled narratives, in which several layers of identity play major roles in the novels. First, Victorians viewed both Jewishness and womanhood as overall determining factors of identity, leaving Jewesses to negotiate both characteristics of self at the same time. Several scholars point out the parallels between sexual and religious identity:

Sexual identity and Jewish identity did have a kind of
structural similarity. Each claimed, on the one hand, an

⁵⁴ *Ivanhoe*'s narrator uses this descriptor in reference to Rebecca of York (Scott, 78).

irreducible physical element and, on the other hand, an enormous burden of cultural, spiritual, and historical significations. (quoted in Pell, 430).⁵⁵⁵⁶

Matthew Biberman adds that many thinkers in the Victorian period saw the pairs of men and women and Jews and Christians as binary opposites. "Woman...is the negation of man," just as "the Jew is the negation [of Christianity]: 'the absolute Jew is devoid of soul'" (Biberman, 181). Thus, both Jewishness and femaleness present all-encompassing, yet problematic, identities.

Not only do Jewesses wrestle with the fusion of two seemingly all-encompassing identity markers, but as minority women they often symbolize nations and national identities in Victorian novels. There are numerous instances of countries and women becoming symbolic for one another; often non-English nations, such as Africa, are "feminized and made Other" (Lovesey, 118) literarily. Charles Lever's⁵⁷ *That Boy of Norcott's* provides a powerful example of this theme in the character of Mrs. Norcott, who symbolically represents Ireland.⁵⁸ As in the tragic tale of Mrs., Norcott, Jewish

⁵⁵ Nancy Pell takes this quote from Cynthia Chase's critique of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*.

⁵⁶ Pell further connects Judaism and sexuality by drawing a comparison between the sacrificial narratives of Isaac and Iphigenia. Pell views the biblical binding of Isaac as the archetypical tale of Jewish identity, while Iphigenia represents the cultural sacrifice of women (Pell, 430).

⁵⁷ Many of Charles Lever's biographers and critics, among them S.P. Haddelsey and Tony Bareham, point to Lever's own Irish background and the sensitivity to Irish persecution he demonstrates in his prolific writing career.

⁵⁸ Mrs. Norcott, the protagonist's mother, begins her life as Irish peasant woman Mary Owen. When an English regiment arrives in her local village, the English Robert Norcott courts and marries Mary. The narrator immediately asserts, "the marriage had been unfortunate in every way" (425), emphasizing "a series of cruelties—some of which savored of madness" (427) which Mary forces herself to endure at Robert's hands. While Lever's text does not explicitly draw a parallel between Mary Norcott and Ireland, the similarities abound. Both Mary and her homeland are suddenly invaded and disrupted by

women's stories compare women and their nations, creating narratives in which domestic and national plotlines frequently converge. Michael Ragussis studies the parallels between "the domestic plot of the daughter and the political plot of the nation" (Ragussis 2, 138). As a result, a satisfactory resolution within a romantic or domestic plot has larger implications, "appear[ing] to resolve problems much more encompassing than those troubling the domestic world" (Armstrong, 137).⁵⁹ In this manner, the domestic issues of parent-child relationships, courtship, and marriage take on enormous significance in the stories of Rebecca, Mirah, Francesca, and Sarah. As I will discuss further, each woman's personal decisions are integrally connected to the survival or degeneration of the Jewish race as a whole, and in particular, the role of Jews in English life and politics.

The intermarriage plot is central to the novels I am studying, which often juxtapose Jewish and Christian marriage partners, forcing protagonists to make agonizing choices. Daniel Deronda vacillates between the Christian Gwendolen Harleth and Jewish Mirah Lapidoth throughout the novel, informing Gwendolen of his decision to wed Mirah only at the very end of Eliot's narrative. Similarly, the plot of *Ivanhoe* revolves around the question of which bride Ivanhoe will select, his fellow Saxon Rowena or "the beautiful Jewess" (Scott, 79) Rebecca or York. In a less direct manner, Digby of *That Boy of Norcott's* pines after a Christian merchant's daughter, Pauline, before meeting Sarah Oppovich. While *The Rebel Queen* paints a less direct opposition between two

English troops, and both suffer at their conqueror's hands. Robert Norcott's continued control of his wife even after they formally separate and he returns to England reflects the years of colonial rule England inflicted on Ireland.

⁵⁹ Armstrong does not make this argument in connection to Jewish women, but rather, to strengthen her assertion that Victorian novels seek to justify the rise of the middle class. Nevertheless, her logic can apply to Jewish women.

women, each of the Jewish characters in the book wrestle with intermarriage—for instance, when Francesca's friend, Nell, elopes with a Christian man, her family initially declares her dead and disowns her. Finally, the fact that nearly all four novels conclude with a marriage highlights the centrality of the intermarriage plot to these texts.

Several complex ideologies are foundational to the intermarriage plot, among them theories of national regeneration, conversion, and ethnic purity. National regeneration is a powerful issue for British Christian women, but garners even greater importance in the context of a minority race. A marginal society's reproductive anxiety chiefly focuses on women, leading authors to place "women...at the heart of a crisis in the survival of oppressed races and cultures"(Ragussis 2, 12).⁶⁰ The minority, in this case Jewish, daughter, holds particular reproductive power due to her young age and potential years of fertility. Significantly, Rebecca, Mirah, and Sarah, among most other literary Jewesses, do not have mothers, focusing the issue of national regeneration squarely on them. Francesca is the only daughter to have a living mother, but Isabel's rampant feminism and estrangement from the Jewish community, in addition to her advanced age, mean that reproducing the next generation is still Francesca's responsibility. Ragussis describes the narrative tension created by "the pairing of a widowed father without further means of procreating his race and a sole daughter in danger of becoming, through conversion or intermarriage, a tool in the procreation of the enemy race" (Ragussis 1, 482). Thus, the familial structure apparent in most stories of the Victorian Jewess assigns her the burden of ensuring racial survival.

⁶⁰ Ragussis applies this argument to Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, but I will be using it in reference to *Daniel Deronda*, *The Rebel Queen*, and *That Boy of Norcott's* as well.

The daughter played a significant role in nineteenth-century English culture, which then transferred to a literary focus on the minority daughter. Historian Deborah Gorham claims, “an idealized view of the daughter’s role is a crucial feature of the cult of domesticity” (6).⁶¹ For the Jewish or minority daughter, obedience to one’s father represents national loyalty as “her father and her fatherland” (Ragussis 1, 478) fuse into a single symbolic entity. Many scholars view this pressure on the daughter as a coercive force—Ragussis emphasizes the daughter’s “pure instrumentality” (137), while Nancy Pell employs the dramatic sacrifice of Iphigenia as a trope for “the daughter whose life is consumed in unwilling participation in the father’s cultural task” (437). The pressure to regenerate the nation can prove crushing, as seen in the stories of the two rebel women, Isabel Elveda and the Alcharisi.

The literary emphasis on national regeneration in the novels I am studying not only illustrates the fears of a persecuted minority race, but also reveals the anxieties of a majority race struggling to maintain its “purity.” Ronald Hyam describes a “Purity Campaign” launched in the 1880s focused on discouraging colonial officers from engaging in sexual or marital unions with colonized women, thus keeping the “imperial race” free of pollution (159). Victorian popular literature applied this anxiety to Jews in particular, invoking the general British fear of a “Jewish other” taking over society.⁶²

For Francesca, Mirah, Rebecca, and Sarah, the issues surrounding Jewish national regeneration hinge on conversion and the intermarriage plot. Since continuing the Jewish

⁶¹ Gorham further argues that within the ideology of domesticity the daughter is charged with a similar role as the wife, responsible for bridging the gaps between “the morality of Christianity and the values of capitalism” and “the nostalgia for a simple, pastoral past amid the realities of the urban, industrial present” (37).

⁶² Brian Cheyette describes the British fear of a Jewish coup in his work, *Constructions of “The Jew” in English Literature and Society* (6).

nation requires sexual reproduction, each Jewess' choice to either remain loyal to her religion or convert and form a sexual union with a Christian has political ramifications. The intersection of conversion and sexuality is particularly evident in the rape scenario. When a Jewess or minority woman is threatened with rape, the attack is not only intended on her physical person, but also the nation she represents. In his analysis of *Ivanhoe*, Michael Ragussis considers conversion, rape, and murder to be different methods of achieving the same goal, "the systematic genocide of a people" (Ragussis 2, 155). In Scott's novel, Brian de-Bois Guilbert, a Knight Templar, holds Rebecca of York captive and attempts to have sexual relations with her. The Knight does not clarify his intentions immediately, hinting, "thy ransom must be paid by love and beauty" (Scott, 249). However, as a Knight Templar de-Bois Guilbert cannot marry, but can be excused for the "lesser folly" (Scott, 251) of sex. At one point in his conversation with Rebecca, de-Bois Guilbert directly threatens rape:

"Rebecca; I have hitherto spoken mildly to thee, but now, my language shall be that of a conqueror. Thou art captive of my bow and spear, subject to my will by the laws of all nations; nor will I abate an inch of my right, or abstain from taking by violence what thou refusest to entreaty or necessity." (Scott, 251)

The Knight's threat is not just couched in sexual terms, but also in the language of racial annihilation. Brian continually commands Rebecca to "submit to thy fate, embrace our religion" (251), offering her material wealth, but not marriage. Jean-Paul Sartre uses Rebecca's tale to connect the image of the Jewess with a threat of rape:

There is in the words "a beautiful Jewess" a very special sexual signification, one quite different from that contained in the words "a beautiful Rumanian".... for example. This phrase carried an aura of rape and massacre. (Sartre, 48-9)

In this manner, Sartre articulates the unspoken connection between the Jewish woman, sexual vulnerability, and rape that plays a role in Victorian depictions of the Jewess.

Rebecca's dramatic near-rape echoes other instances in which minority women face threats of rape and racial extinction at once. *Ivanhoe* draws some parallels between the persecution of the Saxons by Norman leaders and the anti-Semitism exhibited towards Isaac of York and Rebecca.⁶³ While the Knight Templar holds Rebecca captive, another evil Knight, Maurice de Bracy, nearly attacks the Saxon Rowena, commanding her threateningly, "I tell thee, thou shalt never leave this castle, or thou shalt leave it as Maurice de Bracy's wife" (Scott, 238). De Bracy's interest goes beyond Rowena's beauty, however, as the Knight makes frequent snide references to Saxons. In a deliberate insult to her Saxon heritage, the Knight asks Rowena, "How else [besides marriage] wouldst thou escape from the mean precincts of a country grange, where Saxons herd with the swine which form their wealth?" (238). In this manner, de Bracy's interest in physically conquering Rowena manifests his real desire as a Norman to dominate over Saxons. Although neither potential rapist ultimately victimizes Rebecca or Rowena, the character of Ulrica in *Ivanhoe* provides a tragic example of a woman whose story does not end quite as optimistically. After witnessing her Saxon family's murder at Norman hands, Ulrica is forced to serve as "the paramour of their murderer, the lover at once and the partaker of his pleasures" (Scott, 277). Thus, the "conversion as rape" (Ragussis 2, 102) scenario plays out in extremely different ways, but always combines an attack on the female body with a larger threat of racial extinction.

⁶³ Michael Ragussis explores the connection between anti-Saxon and anti-Semitic rhetoric at length in his book, *Figures of Conversion* (Ragussis 2).

Beyond the rape scenario, the marital union presents another site of conversion for Francesca, Mirah, Rebecca, and Sarah. Ragussis asks, "Is marriage a kind of conversion?" pointing to Portia's declaration in *The Merchant of Venice*, "Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours/ Is now converted" (quoted in Ragussis 2, 78). Marriage in the Victorian era implied a shift of name, allegiance, and in the case of an intermarriage, religion. If conversion on some level functions as an "essential medium of social change" (Ragussis 2, 172), then marriage, and the conversions it entails, becomes a charged locus of societal shifts. For the Jewess in Victorian literature, marriage decisions are integrally intertwined with the questions of loyalty to Judaism versus assimilation into mainstream British culture.

Francesca, Mirah, Rebecca, and Sarah all encounter the intermarriage debate, but react differently. Unlike Jessica, the prototypical Jewess of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* who chooses to marry the Christian Lorenzo, the Jewish woman characters in *Daniel Deronda*, *Ivanhoe*, *That Boy of Norcott's*, and *The Rebel Queen* respond to the challenge of intermarriage individually, demonstrating an array of female Jewish representations. As Brian Cheyette points out, the "construction of 'the Jew' in English literature and society is far from being a fixed, mythic stereotype" (268). Of the four Jewesses I am studying, two—Rebecca of York and Mirah Lapidoth—decide not to marry their Christian suitors, while Sarah Oppovich and Francesca Elveda both intermarry. In the next pages, I will analyze the common features each set of narratives share, as well as attempt to fuse the apparent discrepancies between the women's decisions and the subsequent implications for their virtue.

The Christian brides, Francesca and Sarah, conclude their journey of Jewish identification by marrying Harold and Digby, respectively, characters with prominent roles in each novel. Since the novels assume that, as obedient wives, Francesca and Sarah will adopt their husband's Christianity, these plotlines yield to the period pressures on Jews to convert. Just as Jessica demonstrates in *The Merchant of Venice*, Francesca and Sarah follow the old adage that "the only good Jew is a Christian" (Cohen, 39). Biberman argues that since Jewish women are too complex to place into a clear category, "the Jewish woman must either be transformed into a Christian, or else she must be eliminated in order to preserve the logic structuring the dominant culture" (55). While this theory does not apply to all of the Jewish woman characters of my study, it provides a useful lens for understanding Francesca and Sarah.

A Jewish woman's ability to marry and join the Christian faith is another source of her comparative virtue over the Jewish man in the eyes of British society. Unlike a male Jew, who has relatively few avenues of true conversion and assimilation into Christian society, the Jewish woman appears somehow more "redeemable" due to having a conversion route in place through marriage. In this manner, Francesca and Sarah fulfill a classic evolutionary narrative of the Jewish woman, "training" in their Jewish communities in order to "evolve" into ideal Christian wives. Even though Rebecca of York does not convert, *Ivanhoe*'s narrator employs a similar evolutionary discourse to describe her, stating, "she felt in her mind the consciousness that she was entitled to hold a higher rank from her merit than the arbitrary despotism of religious practice permitted her to aspire to" (Scott, 247). In each case, the Jewess possesses an inherent virtue that allows her to triumph beyond her religious and national origins. Biberman adds a

physiological element to this argument, quoting scholars who maintain, "the religious status of Jewish women was fixed but easily alterable, given the lack of any female parallel of circumcision" (62). Biberman himself goes a step further, asserting that Victorians saw Jewesses as, in fact, not actually Jewish because they lack any physical marking of religion, like the *brit milah*⁶⁴ (62). Furthermore, Judaism was often critiqued for its supposedly legalistic nature (Biberman, 62); since women were not included in the legal realm within Judaism, their distance from Judaism's textual legality also enabled a smooth transition to Christianity. Ultimately, a Jewish woman's "convertibility" in Victorian literature stems from her separation from classic ideas of the Jew, as "the essential 'Jew' has traditionally been portrayed and conceptualized as male" (Oberter, 9). Since novelists often did not conceive of the Jewess as "a real Jew," Jewish woman characters prove able to Christianize easier than their male coreligionists.

Within the literary worlds of *That Boy of Norcott's* and *The Rebel Queen*, Sarah and Francesca are rewarded for their decision to intermarry. Edgar Rosenberg points to several examples of Jewish matrons who are implicitly critiqued for choosing not to marry out; the grotesque Madame Melmotte of Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* comes to mind as but one example.⁶⁵ Unlike the unfortunate Madame, Sarah and Francesca ensure themselves a comfortable place in society as a result of their marriages. At the close of the novel, the newly wealthy Digby asserts his intention to care for an impoverished Sarah:

⁶⁴ *Brit milah* is the Hebrew term for "circumcision." According to traditional Jewish law, Jewish baby boys must be circumcised at eight days of age.

⁶⁵ *The Way We Live Now's* narrator comments on Madame Melmotte: "she had the Jewish nose and the Jewish contraction of the eyes. There was certainly very little in Madame Melmotte to recommend her, unless it was a readiness to spend money on any object that might be suggested to her by her new acquaintances" (Trollope, 29).

"It is only this morning...that we have received news of the death of Herr Ignaz Oppovich, the last of this once opulent firm, now reduced to utter ruin..."

"He'll marry her, and desert her just as his father did."

[Digby:] I have but to say that I accomplished the one and hope never to fulfill the other." (Lever, 635)

Like Sarah, Francesca leaves her home country at the close of *The Rebel Queen*, embarking on a journey to Palestine. However, while Mirah of *Daniel Deronda* sets out on a similar voyage without planning to return, Francesca's marriage with her Christian suitor, Harold, promises her a place in English society upon her return.

Unlike Francesca and Sarah, Mirah and Rebecca decide not to marry Christian men, instead devoting their energies to Jewish national regeneration. Both women have the option to marry non-Jewish men—Mirah's host, Hans Meyrick, courts her, while both Brian de-Bois Guilbert and Sir Wilfred Ivanhoe serve as potential love interests for Rebecca. The text somewhat assumes Mirah's future fertility, and while Rebecca does not plan to marry, she intends to devote her time to "tending the sick" (Scott, 519) and other charitable pursuits benefiting the Jewish community. In addition, Rebecca may not plan on bearing Jewish children, but at least does not devote her procreative energies to "the other side."⁶⁶ Rebecca and Mirah's choice to not marry outside the race also serves as a powerful affirmation of their Jewish identity. As Mirah declares, "I always feel myself a Jewess" (Eliot, 443). In this manner, Mirah and Rebecca fulfill Edgar Rosenberg's theory that "the Jew in literature remains on the whole obstinately Jewish" (266). In addition, choosing not to intermarry alleviates the period anxiety over racial purity. *Ivanhoe*'s characters are particularly unable to marry across racial boundaries—

⁶⁶ Michael Ragussis describes the minority anxiety of a daughter procreating for the majority race instead of her own (Ragussis 1, 482).

Ivanhoe himself is “too good a Catholic to retain the same class of feelings towards a Jewess” (Scott, 300). Ivanhoe’s repugnance for Rebecca after learning of her religion embodies Victorian notions of racial and ethnic purity.

The contrasting choices Sarah, Rebecca, Mirah, and Francesca make about intermarriage begs an important question—How can all four girls, with their drastically different decisions, all figure as bastions of ideal Victorian femininity? Upon closer examination, there are several explanations that may account for this apparent discrepancy. First of all, the intermarriage plot could not function as such a central conflict in the novels I am studying if it does not represent a very real possibility. In *Ivanhoe*, for instance, Rebecca does not marry her Christian love in the end, but comes very close to doing so. The narrator vividly illustrates Rebecca’s struggle to “fortify her mind not only against the impending evils without, but also against those treacherous feelings [for Ivanhoe] which assailed her from within” (Scott, 321). Given the strength of Rebecca’s love for Ivanhoe—even at the close of the novel, she is unable to imagine forming a romantic attachment to another and has no plans to marry—one can only wonder how the novel might have concluded if Ivanhoe had returned Rebecca’s affection. In fact, contemporary readers of *Ivanhoe* complained to Scott that he chose the wrong woman. In his sequel to Scott’s novel, entitled *Rebecca and Rowena: A Romance Upon a Romance*, William Makepeace Thackeray protests the conclusion of the romantic plotline:

Beloved novel readers and gentle patronesses of romance, assuredly it has often occurred to every one of you, that the books we delight in have very unsatisfactory conclusions... nor can I ever believe that such a woman, so admirable, so tender, so heroic, so beautiful [as Rebecca], could disappear altogether before such another woman as

Rowena, that vapid, flaxen-headed creature, who is, in my humble opinion, unworthy of Ivanhoe, and unworthy of her place as heroine. Had both of them got their rights, it ever seemed to me that Rebecca would have had the husband, and Rowena would have gone off to a convent and shut herself up, where I, for one, would never have taken the trouble of inquiring for her. (Thackeray, 1-4)

Thackeray continues to develop a sequel to *Ivanhoe* in which Rowena and Ivanhoe have a fairly unsuccessful marriage, Rowena dies, and Rebecca and Ivanhoe reunite and marry.⁶⁷

Judith Lewin adds, “reader’s expectations were not the only ones defied [by *Ivanhoe*’s conclusion]; there is evidence from even the earliest dramatic and operatic adaptations of the novel that playwrights and librettists were also upset, many choosing to rewrite the resolution” (Lewin 2, 181). The heated responses to Rebecca and Ivanhoe’s failed intermarriage indicate that unions across racial divisions present a genuine possibility, and thus an agonizing conflict, for the Jewess in Victorian literature.

There are several other explanations for why Francesca, Sarah, Rebecca, and Mirah can all make different marital decisions and yet still all be considered virtuous in the novels they appear in. While Francesca and Sarah convert by marrying Christian men, Rebecca and Mirah overtly remain Jewish. Judith Lewin challenges this assumption, however, by arguing that Rebecca undergoes a subtle conversion by giving away her material goods and observing the Christian values of celibacy and poverty (Lewin 3, 2). Mirah is also compared to a nun by several Christian women, and embodies the Christian trope of achieving redemption through suffering.⁶⁸ Following this

⁶⁷ Michael Ragussis criticizes Thackeray’s version of *Ivanhoe* as a return to the intermarriage resolution of *Merchant of Venice*. However, I wish to focus on Thackeray’s text as a means of demonstrating readers’ frustration at Scott’s resolution.

⁶⁸ I delineate more Christian-like aspects of Francesca, Sarah, Rebecca, and Mirah in my previous chapter on economics and femininity.

theory, Rebecca and Mirah gain the best of both worlds, so to speak, maintaining loyalty to the Jewish nation of their origin while exemplifying idealized British Christian values. In contrast to the Jewish heroines of *Daniel Deronda* and *Ivanhoe*, Sarah and Francesca act as though they are “inherently Christian,”⁶⁹ only using their Jewish background as a springboard for developing the qualities of a Gentile wife. Furthermore, it is also possible that the later publication date of *The Rebel Queen*, which espouses intermarriage for several of its characters, indicates a greater cultural acceptance for interracial unions. Rosenberg comments, “by the second half of the [nineteenth] century, intermarriage between Christians and Jews needed no longer be regarded as a case of extravagant miscegenation” (159). Thus, the fact that Walter Besant published *The Rebel Queen* at the very close of the nineteenth century, in 1893, may account for the novel’s enthusiastic acceptance of mixed marriages. In addition, Besant wrote as a social reformer seeking to promote patriarchal values among his Christian British contemporaries (Oberter, 4). Viewing Jews as vigilant guardians of traditional patriarchy (Oberter, 5), Besant hoped to transmit such values to his English readers. Thus, Francesca’s marriage to Harold also symbolizes the infusion of Jewish values and lifestyles into mainstream British society.

An effort to integrate the contrasting choices made by the Jewesses who intermarry and the ones who do not evokes the Victorian concept of women being somehow more open to conversion than men. Ragussis elucidates the “conversionists’ view of the docility of the (Jewish) woman, [and] her special vulnerability to Christian

⁶⁹ Michael Ragussis analyzes cases of Jewesses exposed as Christian-born at the end of novels such as Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now* and Maria Edgeworth’s *Harrington*. For these women, because they are actually Christian-born, a formal conversion is not even necessary. While both Francesca and Sarah are born Jewish, their conversion is so assumed in the narrative, it almost implies an inherently Christian aspect to both women.

proselytism" (Ragussis 2, 38). Furthermore, Judaism's supposed misogyny appears prominently in Victorian texts, even in such philo-Semitic accounts as *Daniel Deronda*.⁷⁰ According to Christian conversion activists, Judaism's "oppression" of its female practitioners rendered the Jewess "in need of special liberation" (Ragussis 2, 39).⁷¹ Conversionists also allied Christianity with period notions of femininity, claiming that the "simplicity" of Christian faith accorded well with a woman's natural inclination towards simple, pure religious belief (Ragussis 2, 40). Francesca and Sarah prove this theory by converting to Christianity, a choice that fits well with their general submissive, vulnerable characters. For these two Jewesses, "the ductility that makes woman the perfect candidate for conversion is equal to what is seen as her sexual weakness, her sexual submissiveness, her sexual usefulness" (Ragussis1, 487). Francesca and Sarah make ideal British wives because they personify docility to the extreme, willing to exchange their own values for their husband's, vulnerable both sexually and religiously in the unions they form.

Rebecca and Mirah share some of the vulnerability that so characterizes Francesca and Sarah, but react to obstacles in a contrasting manner. When Sarah Oppovich faces a devastating financial crisis, her reflex reaction is to turn to Digby for assistance. "I can give you no instructions," Sarah tells Digby before sending him to fix

⁷⁰ In Eliot's novel, *Daniel Deronda*'s mother, the Alcharisi, makes frequent references to communal suppression of the Jewish woman, supposedly exemplified by such practices as separate seating for men and women during prayers, and women's exclusion from specific commandments, such as wearing *tephillin*, or phylacteries.

⁷¹ Throughout Victorian texts, minority groups are often vilified for their alleged mistreatment of women. In the notes of the first convocation of the London Ladies' Auxiliary Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews, the ladies assembled express compassion for Muslim women's apparent degradation. In the record from that meeting, the text bemoans "the women of those countries, where the inhabitants still groan under the slavery of Mahometan or Pagan superstition" (London Society, 9).

her family's business affairs (Lever, 580). Her parting words to Digby, "[I] trust you in all things" (581), displays Sarah's clear reliance on Digby's "masculine skills" to create order again. Francesca similarly defers to the men in the novel, father Emanuel and fiancée Harold, for the responsibility of making important decisions. Rebecca and Mirah face similar trials to those of their counterparts—Rebecca is imprisoned in a castle and almost raped, tried for sorcery, and almost burned at the stake; Mirah comes close to committing suicide, fears her evil father's return, and suffers romantically. Despite their trying circumstances, Rebecca and Mirah do not display the same level of vulnerability as Sarah and Francesca. Even though *Ivanhoe* frees Rebecca by championing her in a duel and Daniel locates Mirah's family for her, such assistance does not immediately result in a marriage offer. Also, each woman relies on her own strength to a greater degree; Rebecca expertly manipulates Brian de-Bois Guilbert as he attempts to rape her, and Mirah earns her own living as a musician. Perhaps Francesca, Sarah, Mirah, and Rebecca exemplify different elements of femininity—Francesca and Sarah personify womanly vulnerability through their conversions, while Rebecca and Mirah display admirable loyalty to their nation, overcoming great obstacles to maintain their chastity and procreative powers for their own race.

The contrasting feminine ideals Francesca, Mirah, Rebecca, and Sarah represent expose the often-contradictory views of women espoused in the Victorian period. Despite being considered "frail and easily tired," women were also thought to be "ferocious, ambitious schemers" (quoted in Hyam, 115). How such a fatigued woman could simultaneously constantly concoct evil plans is difficult to understand. Queen Victoria, the namesake and inspiration for the Victorian period, herself exhibited such

doubled qualities. Although Victoria held the title, “Empress” and ruled vast territories, she exhibited exaggerated submission to her husband, Albert, addressing him as her “lord and master, her father, guide, and protector” (Harrison, 25) in private correspondence. Period accounts of the female nature portray women as both voraciously sexual (Harrison, 228),⁷² and unable to perform sexually. Some critics claim that many of these contradictory tropes about women can be traced to the doubled male desire for, and fear of, female sexuality (Lowenstein, 96). Regardless, these images strongly shape the constructions of the Jewish woman.

These conflicting images of femininity also abound in the novels I am studying. Mirah at once hates the theater and possesses great talent for it, and Walter Besant’s enthusiasm for patriarchy does not quite extend to his writing style in the *Rebel Queen*, which features female characters that are much more compelling and nuanced than their male counterparts.⁷³ Judith Lewin highlights the numerous contradictions in Rebecca of York’s character, as well. In one classic instance, *Ivanhoe*’s narrator describes Rebecca’s “proud humility,”⁷⁴ a contradiction in terms that establishes Rebecca’s “self-divided, but unsullied” (Lewin 3, 19) character. Like the other Jewesses I am focusing on, Francesca exhibits mutually exclusive characteristics; for example, she is both exceedingly well traveled and “as ignorant of the world as if she had been in a nunnery” (Besant, 78). Thus, the duality evident in Victorian descriptions of women also applies to representations of the Jewess.

⁷² Mrs. Glasher of *Daniel Deronda* provides one instance of a woman who follows her sexual impulses, beginning an adulterous relationship with Mr. Grandcourt, a sin the novel’s plot ultimately punishes her for (Pell, 446).

⁷³ The argument that the female characters in *The Rebel Queen* are drawn with greater attention and expertise appears in Rachel’s Oberter’s discussion of the novel (9).

⁷⁴ Lewin points to this quote from Scott’s novel in her analysis of Rebecca (Lewin 3, 13).

On a superficial level, Victorian literature resolves the issue of contradictory female attributes by dividing women into “good” and “bad” categories, allowing the “good” women to display positive traits, while the “bad” ones exhibit negative characteristics. Deborah Gorham uses the terms “sunbeam” and hoyden” (37) to illustrate the divide between “good” models of womanhood and dangerous examples of contra-femininity. Charles Lever’s *That Boy of Norcott’s* provides one case of this division. In the novel, two women, Mrs. Norcott and Madame Cleremont, find themselves in similar situations, married to abusive men. While Mrs. Norcott responds in a “positive” manner, remaining loyal and submissive to her spouse, Mme. Cleremont erupts in anger, resulting in her portrayal as a villain. However, the “good” and “bad” woman cannot simply exist in several spheres; the tropes play off one another and can only function in unison. As Ronald Hyam phrases it, “ideals of the virgin bride and chaste wife could be sustained only by the services of the prostitute. To say that all women were either angels or whores is an obvious simplification” (62). Women may have been separated into two poles, but those categories could not exist without each other.

Although they represent ideals of virtue, Francesca, Mirah, Rebecca, and Sarah possess contradictory qualities, making them complex characters, and not just cardboard shapes of period ideals. The “sunbeam” or “hoyden” division is ultimately less than useful, since neither trope presents a realistic person to emulate or character to paint. Interestingly, the same can be argued for the conflicting stereotypes of Jews in Victorian literature. Be it the avaricious, whiny Isaac of York, or the complimentary philo-Semitic portrayal of Daniel in *Daniel Deronda*, both the “good” and “bad” Jews have been

accused of being more symbolic than human.⁷⁵ Scholar Zygmunt Bauman synthesizes the tropes by suggesting:

that we use "allosemitism" as a term that includes both anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism as forms of othering. "Allosemitism" retains the difference between anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism, but opens up a new way of thinking by emphasizing that there are also commonalities between them and showing that both are essentially separate branches of the same train of thought. (quoted in Oberter, 6)

Black and white literary representations of any group, whether they be women or Jews, lack the intriguing complexity of fully developed characters. Thus, the contradictions present in the narratives of Francesca, Mirah, Rebecca, and Sarah also lead to more realistic, nuanced portrayals of the Jewish woman. In addition, the Jewesses' fallibility helps readers relate to them, assisting them in being paragons of ideal women, transmitting values of national loyalty and feminine behavior to their British Christian admirers.

Nowhere does the Jewess' "divided self" display itself more prominently than in the arena of sexuality. Both attractive and modest, Jewish woman characters manage to balance a sexually enticing appearance and commitment to chastity. Beauty is a vital element in the novels I am studying, which feature rich evocations of a supposedly distinct "Jewish beauty." *The Rebel Queen's* narrator describes Francesca as an "Eastern Queen" (46), embodying stereotypical Jewish features, such as "rich brown hair" (46)—

⁷⁵ I believe this critique applies more accurately to the portrayal of Isaac of York than Daniel Deronda. I bring it in here to indicate frequent scholarly criticisms of the Jews in the novels.

nearly every literary Jewess is a brunette, rather than a “Christian” blonde.⁷⁶ The narrator goes beyond Francesca’s hair and face, however, informing the reader that “she was not slender; rather she possessed a full and well-formed figure” (Besant, 46).

Francesca’s naiveté does not preclude an extremely sexualized description; it rather seems to enhance the sexual lens with which the novel views her. Sarah, too, possesses “a pale and beautiful face” (Lever, 563), resplendent with “heavy masses of curls,” “a model for symmetry,” and the dramatic beauty of “the goddesses of Homer” (562).

Similarly, Mirah’s “delicate, childlike beauty” (Eliot, 167) produces constant streams of praise from other characters in *Daniel Deronda*.

The reader’s introduction to Rebecca of York also heavily emphasizes her sexual desirability:

The figure of Rebecca might indeed have compared with the proudest beauties of England... Her form was exquisitely symmetric, and was shown to advantage by a sort of Eastern dress, which she wore according to the fashion of the females of her nation. Her turban of yellow silk suited well with the darkness of her complexion. The brilliancy of her eyes, the superb arch of her eyebrows, her well formed aquiline nose, her teeth as white as pearl, and the profusion of her sable tresses, which...fell down upon as much a lovely neck and bosom as a simare of the richest Persian silk. (Scott, 79)

This exaggerated account of Rebecca’s beauty evokes a period trend, the “hyperbole.... concerning the female Jewish body in general” (Lathers, 30). The “commonplace” (Lathers, 30) fixation on the Jewess’ beauty is evidenced by the fact that Rebecca reappears as a model of the Jewish body in *Daniel Deronda*. Upon taking Mirah home to meet her host family, the Meyricks, Daniel comments, “[they] would at once associate a

⁷⁶ Sarah Oppovich and Clara, a tangential character in *The Rebel Queen* are two counter-examples with blonde hair, but far in the minority.

lovely Jewess with Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*" (Eliot, 173). Despite its prevalence, there are many disturbing elements of Rebecca's portrayal in this passage. First, the narrator figuratively dissects her body, moving through each body part and analyzing it. This intensely sexual depiction mirrors King John's predatory gaze, analyzing Rebecca as an item of consumption, "that Eastern houri that thou lockest under thy arms as thou wouldst thy treasure-casket" (Scott, 79). Furthermore, Lewin points out that the yellow hue of Rebecca's turban echoes the color used to denote a prostitute, hinting at sexual availability on Rebecca's part (Lewin 1, 8).⁷⁷

The sexual depiction of Rebecca's beauty, along with that of Mirah, Francesca, and Sarah, also contains numerous racial elements, exposing the interconnections between sexuality and race in the Jewess' narratives. The physical portrayals of the Jewess evoke Eastern, Oriental images. In his work on Jewish models, Maric Lathers quotes period writers lauding the "biblical delicacy" of the Jewess, who is "the Oriental type in its purity" (29). Rebecca's turban adds an eastern, "exotic" edge to her image (Lewin 1, 5), while Mirah is portrayed as an "exotic commodity" (Golightly, 56).

The Jewess' "exotic beauty" (Lathers, 27) connects to other sexualized eastern images, and that of the harem in particular. From the well-known painter who called his Jewish models "true marvels of the harem" (Lathers, 30) to the "salacious, succulent houris of the far East" (Hyam, 89) dreamed about in British popular culture, references to harems are exceptionally sexualized, evoking a world of female submission and sexual availability. In *The Rebel Queen*, Clara employs the harem image, commenting, "You are truly an Oriental through and through, Francesca. You would live in a harem

⁷⁷ In an interesting conflation, Lewin posits that the color yellow denoted not only a prostitute, but a Jew as well (Lewin 1, 8).

secluded and guarded" (Besant, 86). This association of Orientalism and racial notions of sexuality relates back to another important aspect of the Victorian period, colonialism. Hyam's assertion that "sex is at the very heart of racism" (203) evokes both rhetoric on Eastern women's sexuality and the actual abuse of colonized women by some British officers.⁷⁸ Images like the harem conjure up notions of an unattainable, but enticing, woman and race, in some ways leading readers to view the Jewess with the same ardor and perverse fascination that King John displays towards Rebecca in Scott's novel.

Associating sexuality and race takes on new meaning when it comes to Judaism, with its questionable physical visibility. Despite the Jews' status as a generally "white" nation, Victorians viewed Jews as a different race in the nineteenth century.⁷⁹ According to Oberter, nineteenth-century thinkers hotly debated, "is Jewish identity 'stamped' on a person's face?" (2). On one level, certain qualities were labeled distinctly Jewish, from "the Jewish nose" to "brunette beauty" (Scott, 23). Matthew Frye Jacobson even contested that Jewish skin held "a whiteness of a different color" (quoted in Oberter, 3). This intense focus on physical characteristics reflected the general presumption of the era that a person's physiognomy could accurately affect their inner virtue, or "a person's and race's moral condition is expressed through the face" (Oberter 4-5).

Judaism is at turns blatantly visual for the Jewess, but can also be disturbingly difficult to locate in the Jewish woman's face. Besant is particularly concerned with facial representations of Judaism, applying them to many of his characters. Describing a group of Jewish women, the narrator of *The Rebel Queen* remarks, "they were pleasant

⁷⁸ Hyam delineates colonists' rape of local women (2), as well as other colonial abuses in his work, *Empire and Sexuality*.

⁷⁹ The Saxons and Celts are two other examples of white-skinned peoples who were still not considered to be part of the "white race" in the Victorian period (Oberter, 3).

girls to look at...with calm and serious faces, housewifely, trustworthy, industrious, what we call, when we are very serious, *good faces*" (Besant, 221). Another character in the novel, Emanuel, tells his wife that she cannot escape her Jewish heritage because "on our faces there is a mark set—the seal of the Lord—by which we know each other and are known by the world" (11). This visual tension plays out in a particular way for the novel's heroine, Francesca. Initially, Francesca's mother tells her she is Moorish, not Jewish, but everyone else can immediately recognize her true heritage by her facial features. However, it is not until Emanuel has Francesca gaze into a mirror herself that she recognizes her own, apparently very Jewish, face. Oberter sees this confusing turn of events as proof of the instability of identity itself, as well as its physical manifestations:

[The characters] look the most stereotypically Jewish at key moments in the text, the moments of revelation; this perhaps suggests that one sees Jewishness only when one is looking for it or that one's identity is chameleon-like and changes with the context. (Oberter, 6)

Therefore, while on some level the virtuous Jewess displays her moral integrity through her physical beauty, the complex nature of physical signs of Jewishness indicates that the reality may be more complicated.

Victorian discussions on the visibility of Jewish identity reflect the period trope of the "hidden Jew," which appears in the novels I am studying through the symbol of the veil. Michael Ragussis describes "the anxiety that suspects the Jew of concealing his identity" (Ragussis 2, 181).⁸⁰ The veil, a powerful representation of hiding and revelation, appears periodically in *Daniel Deronda*, *Ivanhoe*, and *The Rebel Queen*.

⁸⁰ Ragussis connects this anxiety over the "secret Jew" to Benjamin Disraeli's term as Prime Minister, and the various racial comments Disraeli's political ascendancy produced. Despite Disraeli's conversion to Christianity, Victorian popular literature continued to label him as a Jew.

Rebecca wears veils at several key points in *Ivanhoe*, wrapping herself “closely in her veil...against those treacherous feelings” (321) while struggling with her love for the Christian knight. Later, at Rebecca’s climactic trial, “the Grand Master commanded Rebecca to unveil herself” (421). Rebecca’s forced revelation of her face elicits a dramatic response: “her exceeding beauty excited a murmur of surprise” (421). In Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* the Alcharisi wears a dark black lace veil, which takes on symbolic significance. Francesca also dresses in a veil, throwing it off as a metaphoric rejection of patriarchy while performing in a play for her mother’s feminist circle (Besant, 41). Melkah, the old Jewish servant woman in *The Rebel Queen*, covers her features with a veil regularly.

There are several angles with which to understand the veil and its role in the stories of Francesca, Sarah, and Rebecca. First, the veil evokes ideal Victorian femininity (Lewin 1, 13) due to its modesty and evocation of “ancient values.” When ordered to remove her veil, Rebecca responds with an argument based on modesty, “that is was not the wont of the daughters of her people to uncover their faces when alone in an assembly of strangers” (Scott, 421). The veil also connects to the bridal veil (Lewin 1,15), an important symbol of femininity.

Beyond the feminine notions ascribed to the veil, the covering also brings up issues of otherness and the unknowable. Lewin illuminates the tendency of some texts to collapse “the ‘reality’ of the Jewish woman into the unknowable” (Lewin 2, 200). The Alcharisi’s voluminous dark veil is synonymous with her inaccessibility as a Victorian woman; she lacks even the most “basic” maternal instincts. Clara informs her father that Francesca has “something mysterious about her...something concealed—something to be

discovered. It is as if she had worn a veil. Always she seems to be revealing something new” (Besant, 77). Francesca’s metaphoric veil, and its subsequent lifting, echoes her own journey from being ignorant of her origins to a firm believer in the faith and ideologies of Judaism. The Jewess’ veil corresponds to a general stereotype of the secret Jew who requires “unveiling” (Ragussis 2, 212) or, more negatively, unmasking.⁸¹ As Lewin puts it, “If, in the nineteenth century, the physiognomy was read as an expression of the inner character, the imposition of the veil and its eventual removal enacts a scene of revelation, providing access to...an innermost, secret self” (Lewin 1, 13-14). Thus, the veil is more than just a piece of cloth; for Francesca, Rebecca, and the Alcharisi it functions as a dramatic process of engaging with their identities as both women and Jews.

One final element of the hidden Jew appears in the story of Queen Esther, which appears with surprising frequency in Victorian texts. Esther represents the classic hidden Jew, a woman who conceals her identity in a Gentile palace in order to ultimately show loyalty to her own people. Even the name “Esther” means “hidden” in Hebrew, reinforcing this theme. Besant’s *The Rebel Queen* gives Esther an important symbolic function; she represents classic femininity in a play staged by Isabel Elveda’s feminist organization. Esther’s story recalls many of the issues surrounding the Jewish woman in nineteenth century literature, from intermarriage to sexuality to issues of female power.⁸² While Esther’s story, like the narratives of Francesca, Rebecca, Mirah, and Sarah, involves contradictions and non-idyllic compromises, she ultimately functions as a

⁸¹ Both Daniel Deronda and the biblical Moses present positive examples of the “secret Jew,” since both men use their multicultural upbringing to achieve great things for the Jewish nation.

⁸² Esther herself intermarries with King Ahasuerus, lives in a harem for an extended period of time, and serves as a vehicle, with her brother, Mordechai, to save the Jewish people from ruin (The Scroll of Esther).

powerful symbol of national loyalty, as well as femininity. Like the Jewess, Esther achieves virtue in an unwelcoming society by remaining loyal to her people while negotiating a complex string of secrets and revelations.

Sexuality is a vital, if challenging, locus for understanding the Jewish woman in Victorian literature. For the four characters I am focusing on, elements such as physical beauty, courtship, and even clothing contain more than surface significance. As evidenced by the varying conclusions of each woman's narrative, there are several ways of living as a Jewish woman and still retaining moral integrity in the eyes of the Victorian novel. Achieving the balance necessitates careful and deliberate choices, and produces inevitable conflicts. Studying the narratives of Francesca, Mirah, Rebecca, and Sarah reveals the complex, multidirectional, and at times contradictory manner that national ideologies flourish and evolve.

I'm not resigned, not patient, not school'd in
 To take my starveling's portion and pretend
 I'm grateful for it. I want all, all, all;
 I've appetite for all. I want the best:
 Love, beauty, sunlight, nameless joy of life.
 There's too much patience in the world, I think.
 We have grown base with crooking of the knee.
 --From Amy Levy's "A Minor Poet"⁸³

Conclusion:
 Another Perspective on the Jewess

I have devoted this thesis to examining outsider perspectives on Victorian Jewish women, told from the pens of Christian British authors attempting to understand their subjects. In conclusion, I will shift my focus to the writing of a Jewish woman herself, in order to juxtapose both external and internal perspectives of the Jewess and her role in British society. Amy Levy's work presents an alternative view to the inner workings of the Jewish woman that Eliot, Scott, Besant, and Lever portray; but in other ways, Levy's texts mirror the same themes and ideas. Ultimately, all these authors' portrayal of the Jewish woman indicates deeper-set theories about nationalism, collective identity, and the self. My previous chapters have demonstrated the complexity of the Jewish woman, a theme Levy reinforces with her at times contradictory depictions. Just as the Jewess' liminal status lends her the ability to encounter nationalist issues in the other novels I have studied, Levy's characters lead to unique analyses of statehood and the self.

Amy Levy (1861-1889) was born to a Jewish family in Clapham, England and excelled academically, attending Newham College in Cambridge (New, 4). Throughout her literary career, Levy published short fiction, poetry, nonfiction essays, and novels.

⁸³ Found in *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy* (370).

Only two months prior to her twenty-eight birthday, Levy committed suicide, dying of charcoal gas inhalation after putting her head in a stove (New, 1). According to Melvyn New, Levy's tragic death illuminates "the despairs of an educated Jewish woman in late Victorian England" (1). While some of Levy's characters, among them the Lorimer sisters of *The Romance of a Shop*, are not necessarily Jewish,⁸⁴ Levy's position as a Victorian Jewish woman permeates her work, and in particular, the female characters she creates.

Just as Eliot, Scott, Lever, and Norcott wrote in dialogue with one another, Amy Levy was familiar with most of the novels I am studying, mentioning *Daniel Deronda*, *Ivanhoe*, and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in her work.⁸⁵ New argues, "Levy's world is clearly the world of books" (3), indicating that Levy's work stems from an author well versed in period literature. The women Levy invents draw strong contrasts from Mirah, Rebecca, Sarah, and Francesca, demonstrating the differences between an internal and external account of the Jewish woman's life. For instance, Levy disagrees with Mirah's portrayal in *Daniel Deronda*, claiming the novel "cannot be regarded as a success; although every Jew must be touched by, and feel grateful for the spirit which breathes throughout the book" (quoted in New, 17). Rather than create a seemingly perfect woman, Levy seeks to draw characters in a more realistic manner, complete with "curious mingling of diametrically opposed qualities" (quoted in New, 17).

⁸⁴ *The Romance of the Shop* contains few references to specific religious faiths, making the Lorimer sisters' religious affiliation unclear to decipher.

⁸⁵ Levy frequently cites *Daniel Deronda*, often to disagree with Eliot's philo-Semitic portrayal of the Jewish community (New, 17). References to Shylock and Rebecca of York appear in Levy's nonfiction essay on Jewish parenting (Levy, 529).

Beauty presents a pivotal issue for Levy, leading her to write in a very different vein than many of the authors I am focusing on. Mirah, Francesca, Rebecca, and Sarah are all described as exceedingly beautiful, their loveliness proving a manifestation of inner virtue.⁸⁶ In Levy's work, the opposite is true, with beauty representing fickleness and shallow materialism. Comparing Scott's extravagant description of Rebecca of York with Levy's introduction of Gertrude, the protagonist of *The Romance of a Shop* yields almost comical results. Rather than illustrate a "neck and bosom as [lovely as] a simare of the richest Persian silk" (Scott, 79) such as the one possessed by Rebecca of York, Levy instead emphasizes Gertrude's plainness:

Gertrude Lorimer was not a beautiful woman...She had an arching, unfashionable forehead, like those of Leonardo da Vinci's women, shortsighted eyes, and an expressive mouth and chin. As she stood in the full light of the spring sunshine, her face pale and worn with recent sorrow, she looked, perhaps, older than her twenty-three years. (Levy 2, 60)

Levy dissects her subject with the same physical detail as *Ivanhoe*'s narrator uses, but provides the opposite image, one of extreme dullness, rather than beauty. In some places, Levy is even vindictive towards her beautiful characters; the two most beautiful women in *The Romance of a Shop*, Phyllis Lorimer and Lord Watergate's first wife, both die agonizing early deaths.

Levy also differs from Eliot, Scott, Lever, and Besant in her interpretation of the cult of domesticity. Rather than create characters that emulate the Victorian feminine ideal like Mirah, Rebecca, and their ilk, Levy's characters challenge traditional notions of

⁸⁶ This does not apply to the two virago women, Isabel Elveda and the Alcharisi, who use their beauty to gain wealth or manipulate men. For instance, Elveda attempts to use her charms to control her husband (Besant, 4). While beauty is thus not a foolproof sign of virtue, for the "good" female characters outward prettiness only emphasized inner beauty.

femininity. For instance, Fanny Lorimer is both the ideal feminine woman and the most needy and unintelligent figure in the novel. Fanny represents “the incarnation of all that is sweetest and most essentially feminine in woman” (Levy 2, 145), viewing womanhood as mainly connected to “riband bows on the curtains” (Levy 2, 89) and other such domestic details. By associating the Victorian ideal for women with as insipid a character as Fanny, Levy humorously argues with the period notions of femininity themselves. In addition, while Francesca, Mirah, Rebecca, and Sarah either avoid the economic realm or engage with it in minor ways, the Lorimer sisters of *The Romance of a Shop* open a photography business, a particularly conspicuous form of economic activity.⁸⁷ While some the Lorimers’ relatives deplore the “unladylike” nature of the shop, the sisters largely embrace their economically active life. The type of womanhood the Lorimers embody poses a stark contrast to the femininity espoused in *The Rebel Queen*, whose narrator asserts, “most women ardently desire that separation [of work and home]” (Besant, 192).

As a Jewish woman herself, Levy approaches Jewish history from a different angle than most of the novelists I am studying. Rather than viewing Jews as an ahistorical people comprising only a vestige of their past greatness, Levy’s work is deeply rooted in the present, treating Jews as they are instead of referring to a construction of the “ancient Israelite.” Levy employs biblical referents humorously; when Conny, a friend, finds Gertrude upset, she asks playfully, “My dear Gertrude, what’s this? Rachel weeping among her children?” (Levy 2, 67). Levy further delineates humor as the Jewish “national free-masonry” (Levy, 524), describing Jewish heritage in a

⁸⁷ Refer back to Chapter III, my chapter on economics and femininity, for more information on this matter.

much more present-focused manner than Eliot or Scott's grand articulations of the great Jewish past.

While Levy's work differs from novels by Eliot, Scott, Besant and Lever in significant ways, there are also surprising similarities between the two bodies of writing. First, despite being a member of the Jewish community, Levy exhibits some of the same prejudiced attitudes towards Jews found in novels by Christian authors. In an essay entitled, "Middle-Class Jewish Women of Today," Levy insists that a Jew is "more Oriental at heart than a casual observer might infer," causing "the shadow of the harem" to rest on Jewish women (Levy, 525). On this point, Levy echoes *The Rebel Queen*, in which Francesca's friend tells her, "you are truly an Oriental through and through... You would live in a Harem secluded and guarded" (Besant, 86). Levy also shares Victorian novelists' frequent degradation of Jewish male characters, bemoaning the common instance of Jewish men "absorbed in money-making, and... such genuine Orientals at heart" (Levy, 526). The type of Jewish man Levy describes instantly beckons images of the avaricious Shylock and Isaac of York, stereotypes unexpected from a Jewish writer. Finally, Levy claims that Jews suffer from high rates of "mental and nervous disease," (531) again presenting a seemingly anti-Semitic comment about the Jewish race.

Despite the fact that *The Romance of a Shop* contradicts numerous aspects of ideal Victorian femininity, Levy also subtly upholds traditional domestic ideologies in parts of her writing. For instance, while the Lorimers' financial success celebrates female economic independence, *The Romance of a Shop* also illuminates the pitfalls of economic responsibility for women. At one point in the novel, a female neighbor attempts suicide after failing to pay her bills. Upon discovering this information,

Gertrude imagines the economic terrain as a “pitiless, fathomless ocean...into whose boiling depths hundreds sank daily and disappeared, never to rise again” (Levy 2, 100). This terrifying description of the financial world on some level negates the novel’s ostensible optimism about women’s involvement in earning money. Economic issues are also deeply intertwined with marriage plots, Levy’s novel ends with a series of marriages, much like the novels with typically feminine characters, from *Daniel Deronda* and *Ivanhoe* to *That Boy of Norcott’s* and *The Rebel Queen*. By the novel’s close, each character marries and settles down, with only Phyllis Lorimer’s death marring the happy ending. Furthermore, just as Mirah abandons her musical career upon marrying Daniel, the photography shop no longer functions as a family enterprise after the Lorimer sisters marry. Instead, Lucy, one of the sisters, takes over the shop and establishes a niche in taking photos of children (Levy 2, 195).

Gertrude in *The Romance of a Shop* shares more in common with the traditionally feminine woman than meets the eye.⁸⁸ Gertrude’s attitudes towards sexuality become more conservative as the novel progresses; as the other sisters comment, “Gertrude is shocked...one is always stumbling unawares on her sense of propriety” (Levy 2, 115). Gertrude also mirrors the courage of Mirah and Rebecca of York. Just as Rebecca demonstrates bravery when a Knight Templar threatens her with rape, Gertrude confronts Darrell, a married man who has seduced her younger sister Phyllis. At one point in the exchange, Gertrude discovers her own strength:

⁸⁸ Gertrude might resemble Amy Levy herself, since the novel is told from Gertrude’s perspective and, like Levy, she is a poet and writer (Levy 2,126). Thus, perhaps Gertrude’s contrasting feminist and feminine qualities indicate Levy’s own conflicting feelings on Victorian femininity.

Then, with a curious elation, a mighty throb of what was almost joy, Gertrude knew that she, not he, the man of whom she had once been afraid, was the stronger of the two. For one brief moment some fierce instinct in her heart rejoiced. (Levy 2, 175)

Like the Jewesses I am studying, Gertrude's loyalty to her family lends her strength beyond the supposed limits of femininity.

While her characters exhibit some of the classic signs of femininity, Levy's nonfiction writings and poems share the ideas of the two rebel women, Isabel Elveda of Besant's *The Rebel Queen* and Daniel's mother, the Alcharisi, in *Daniel Deronda*. Like these women who rebel against traditional tenets of female behavior, Levy's work views Judaism as an obstacle to female emancipation. Levy's "Ballad of Religion and Marriage" (Levy, 404) integrally connects religion with domestic control of women, arguing for the diminishing of both. In an essay, Levy depicts Judaism as a figurative wall holding women back, illustrating a scene of "eager women beating themselves in vain against the solid masonry of our ancient fortifications, long grown obsolete and of no use save as obstructions" (Levy, 527). In addition, Levy sees conservative gender roles as "the most enduring sentiments" (527) of Judaism, echoing Isabel Elveda's conviction that obedience is "the whole of the Law for Woman" (Besant, 8).

Finally, a salient similarity between Levy's work and Eliot, Scott, Lever, and Besant's novels is the recurring theme of love conflicting with independence. Levy's characters in *The Romance of a Shop* and poetic personas share concerns with the Jewesses I am studying about balancing romantic love with personal integrity, feminine submission with marital freedom, and happiness with respect. Gertrude wrestles with her desire for independence along with her "feminine belief in love as the crown and flower

of life” (Levy 2, 131-2). In her romantic relationship, Gertrude wonders if “Lord Watergate might have loved her more if he had respected her less” (Levy 2, 193). Underlying their economic independence, each of the Lorimer sisters experience “the human cry for happiness—the woman’s cry for love” (Levy 2, 191), which often conflicts with their sense of personal strength. This same conflict comes through in *The Rebel Queen* and *Daniel Deronda* in particular. Besant’s novel employs the story of Queen Esther and her predecessor, Vashti to illustrate this issue. In a performance of Esther’s story, Vashti argues, “She who belongs to a man loses all her strength, if ever she had any. I would be a queen and a ruler, not a queen and a favorite” (Besant, 40). Unlike the independent, but unloved Vashti, the play casts Esther as the happier woman, albeit less independently strong. Daniel Deronda and his mother have a conversation on the subject as well, in which the Alcharisi declares, “I know very well what love makes of men and women—it is subjection,” adding, “I was never willingly subject to any man. Men were subject to me.” Daniel’s counterpoint gets to the crux of the conflict of love and respect: “Perhaps...who was subject was the happier of the two,” Daniel suggests (Eliot, 605). The challenge of balancing a relationship with an integral self permeates the texts I am studying, shaping the decisions and difficulties of Jewish women.

The conflict between love and respect mirrors larger intellectual conflicts in British society, driving to the heart of nationalism and identity. Coordinating a relationship with another person without losing one’s self evokes the conflicting demands of personal and collective needs. Nancy Armstrong lists the issue of “self” versus “society” as one of the pressing dilemmas of the rising British middle class, struggling to ensure that “emotional gratification was equally available to everyone in private life and

moral order could be realized" (137). Victorian novels charge their Jewesses with managing a host of identities and maintaining a cohesive, moral self throughout. Jewish woman characters balance their roles as members of Jewish and English society; for instance, despite her strong devotion to the Jewish community, Rebecca of York still insists, "I am of England" (Scott, 300). In addition, the Jewess must achieve equilibrium between her position as a woman and as a Jew, as a daughter and as a love interest, among other potentially conflicting roles.

The challenging of maintaining various, and at times, conflicting, identities, goes beyond the Jewish woman to the difficulties of conceptualizing nationalism itself. The questions of what defines a person as an individual, and to what extent a group identity contributes to a personal sense of self, lead to a more thoughtful view of nationalist language, and the sense of identity national rhetoric hopes to inspire. In one sense, nationalism contradicts individuality by lumping people into a group sharing unique characteristics, almost like a large-scale individual. Jean-Paul Sartre, writing against anti-Semitic prejudice among Frenchmen, encapsulates the contradictions of nationalism. Sartre attributes a "spirit of synthesis" to anti-Semites, a concept which views people under the assumption that "a whole is more and other than the sum of its parts; a whole determines the meaning and underlying character of the parts that make it up" (Sartre, 34). According to Sartre, anti-Semites essentialize other nations, seeing larger "national traits" as more powerful than individual behavior. For instance, even if an anti-Semite were to agree that a single Jew is not greedy, that would not alter his or her general perception of Jews as avaricious (Sartre, 56). Once nationalism labels groups with

specific attributes, the groups define themselves against one another. Sartre elucidates the psychology behind nationalist anti-Semitism:

If by some miracle all the Jews were exterminated as [an anti-Semite] wishes, he would find himself nothing but a concierge or a shopkeeper in a strongly hierarchical society in which the quality of "true Frenchman" would be at a low valuation, because everyone would possess it. He would lose his sense of rights over the country because no one would any longer contest them. (Sartre, 28)

As Sartre illustrates, nationalism functions through a complex psychological process in which a nation is conceived of as an individual of sorts, defined against other groups. Furthermore, as much as nationalism lumps people in a single category, it also provides a larger context for identity, preventing a person from being just an ordinary individual.

George Eliot echoes this point in her essay, "The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!", arguing, "our dignity and rectitude are proportioned to our sense of relationship with something great...of aims larger and more attractive to our generous part than the securing of our personal ease or prosperity" (148). Once again, the individual's value is, perhaps ironically, measured by his or her contribution to a larger group.⁸⁹ For Eliot, the value of this large-scale involvement is nearly inestimable, requiring great sacrifice; in the author's words, "there is something specifically English...worth dying for, rather than living to renounce it" (Eliot 2, 160). Thus, the group identity of nationalism transfers to the individual, making potential loss worthwhile as national identity supersedes a more personalized sense of self.

⁸⁹ The theme of individual sacrifice for a larger, greater cause underlies the plot of Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, in which Daniel's involvement in Zionism renders him morally superior to the isolated Gwendolen Harleth.

The conflicts between self and society that nationalism exposes recall the struggles of Mirah, Francesca, Sarah, and Rebecca, as they attempt to balance a host of identities. Beneath this balancing act lies a complex web of desires—the desire for love, for loyalty to one’s nation or nations, for belonging to a larger group without abandoning a unique self. Amy Levy’s poetry powerfully articulates “those vague desires” and “eager longings” in a “maiden breast” (Levy, 358), which vividly appear in the narratives of Victorian Jewesses. These desire are not always fulfilled and characters like Rebecca of York sacrifice love and companionship for national loyalty, while Levy herself committed suicide. The Jewesses peopling Victorian literature are generally young and hopeful, with a host of desires for the future simmering beneath their dialogue and actions. As quoted in this chapter’s epigraph, Levy writes, “I want all, all, all.” Wanting plays a vital role in the Jewish woman’s story, and while achieving desires is not always possible, the creative expression of those longings exposes the fascinating interplay between priorities and loyalties.

Understanding the Jewess’ competing identities and conflicting desires provides an interesting avenue for discussing philosophical issues of nationalism, identity, and the self. The Jewish woman character’s liminal position, with one proverbial foot in British society and another in the Jewish world, allows Victorian novelists to explore larger concepts. *Daniel Deronda*, *The Rebel Queen*, *That Boy of Norcott’s*, and *Ivanhoe* all discuss issues of nationalism, using the Jewess, with her part insider and part outsider status, to confront these topics. Amy Levy, a Victorian Jewish herself, creates characters that both concur with and challenge external representations of this category of women. The Jewess is emblematic of the broad issues of nation and regeneration, the personal

plotlines that shape daily existence, and the ties that bind the threads of emotional and political, of lover and nation.

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