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Otherness and Identity in the Victorian Novel

Much recent journalism to the contrary, migrations, diasporas, and even globalization are not phenomena originating in the post-colonial, post-industrial, post-Cold War period of our own day (Crossette). Population transfer, at least, was already a prominent feature of the post-Enlightenment, post-French Revolution era of national consolidation and imperial expansion that followed the British victories of 1815. The increased mobility of populations and their concentration in cities were distinctive signs of nineteenth century Britain, driven by the Industrial Revolution's vast production of wealth, by the slave trade and colonial expansion, and by new technologies like the train, the canal, and the steamship. Such mobility inevitably compelled the Victorians to experience greater regional, religious, racial and national diversity.

Yet until relatively recently literary critics paid little attention to the way Victorians represented such experiences. To be sure, since the 1960s, Victorian critics have been aware that the Victorian writers and readers did not comprise a unified body. Histories like E. P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class (1966) helped to nuance critics' awareness of Victorian class divisions. Steven Marcus's The Other Victorians (1966) helped to dispel our sense that Victorians were unified by sexual prudishness. During the 1970s, Gilbert and Gubar's Madwoman in the Attic (1979) and other early feminist texts helped inspire the

production of an increasingly sophisticated analysis in the way critics understood Victorian women writers and the period's representation of gender.

But the equally complex representations of racial, ethnic, religious, and regional Others have taken somewhat longer to come in for critical consideration. Victorian "Others" were members of marginalized groups whose collective identity was perceived to differ in fundamental ways from the white, Protestant, English-speaking Victorian mainstream. Majority writers often perceived a group's Otherness as an ineradicable barrier to its acceptance into the full rights and privileges of citizenship. This perceptual barrier reinforced and was reinforced by immigration policies, economic and political restrictions, newspaper articles, social scientific reports, Darwinian racial rankings, and, not least, the representations of Others in novels, poems, and plays. These texts gave voice to the suspicion (growing, at various heated moments, into a widespread conviction) that members of non-white, non-Protestant, non-English-speaking groups were unalterably alien, unassimilable, and inferior. The texts frequently posed questions about how England's marginal groups might be brought into relation with the apparently unified nation-state and empire. Victorians debated the social and political status of Jews, of freed slaves, of immigrants from the colonies, of migrants from occupied domestic regions, and of non-conforming Christian groups.

The earliest critical consideration of these "Other Victorians," from the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, tended to treat such representations as "stereotypes," collections of exaggerated or false traits ascribed to a group and assumed to remain fixed through time (Modder). For example, a critic might consider the question of whether Dickens's Jewish criminal, Fagin, was a forerunner to the anti-Semitic types propounded by the Nazis (cf. Stone). While this kind of approach paid close attention to the elements of a given representation, it

lacked attention to the particular historical and biographical contexts in which the representation emerged. More recently critics interested in cultural history have tried to demonstrate that such representations were for the most part not fixed stereotypes, but were constantly shifting in form and meaning throughout the period. Indeed, the peculiar and sometimes horrifying power of images of the Other resided in their very mutability, in the way they could become transformed to express diverse, even opposed, cultural anxieties. The earliest of these critical considerations was probably Said's controversial Orientalism (1978), a work that aimed to explain representations of "the Oriental" using an early version of what has come to be known since the late 1980s as a post-colonial approach. His Culture and Imperialism (1993) made this methodology even more explicit. The two works have inspired a cottage industry of studies of the literatures of colonialism and imperialism.¹

A more hidden and therefore more troubling lack in the earlier criticism was its neglect of literary texts published by Victorian writers of Indian, African, Scottish, or Jewish descent. Critics paid almost exclusive attention to the appearances of the Other in the "great" texts, which (incidentally) had been written by those whose own race, religion, ethnicity, or region was hegemonic. Yet by attending only to texts in the received canon, such criticism neglected what could be called Victorian counter-literatures, for all of the marginalized groups produced literatures of their own which engaged in provocative and productive encounters with the hegemonic literature.² Since the late 1980s, critics of colonial, Anglo-Jewish, and Irish and Scottish literatures have begun to reintroduce readers to writing by those deemed Other, in order to provide what Said himself would call a "contrapuntal" reading of the period's literary history (Culture 18).³ Such a reading, these critics argue, not only brings to light previously forgotten or

neglected writing, it also gives a fuller, more accurate account of the “uneven development” of Victorian literary history (Poovey).

Victorians had numerous ways—literary and otherwise—of articulating their ideology concerning English national and British imperial identity in light of their experiences of diversity. Two of the most important non-literary venues were scientific tracts and polemics. Victorian scientists developed a number of distinct “sciences of race”—craniometry, phrenology, eugenics, statistics, anthropology, and social Darwinism, just to name a few—devoted to demarcating and prioritizing all the imagined shades of color the scientists called races.⁴ In the realm of politics, polemicists engaged in pamphlet wars over the question of Jews’ and Catholics’ emancipation, and Indian education in the 1830s and 1840s. For example, the liberal Member of Parliament and historian Thomas Babington Macaulay gave both a “Speech on Jewish Civil Disabilities” (1831) and later, as President of the Committee on Public Instruction in India, a “Minute on Indian Education” (1835). The question of Africans’ rights was addressed as early as Edmund Burke’s Sketch of a Negro Code (1780) and, although still a burning issue nearly a century later, was treated quite differently in Thomas Carlyle’s essay on liberal democracy, “Shooting Niagara: And After?” (1867).

Literary representations of the Other appeared in every genre, but especially in the novel, which more than any other literary form of the period attempted to analyze and represent Victorian socio-political stratification. Critics have usefully examined the novelistic representations of each form of Otherness, considering, for instance, representations of the “Oriental,” the “African,” the “Indian,” the “Irish,” the “Jew,” or the “Scot.”⁵ By relating the characteristics of these representations to one another, such critics have begun to develop what might be called “a unified field theory” of Otherness, describing how each such representation

functions in a larger Victorian project: the project of disciplining the conceptual borders of the nation-state. At the same time, such criticism has sought to avoid the assumption that, for the Victorians, all forms of Otherness could be reduced to a fixed collection of stereotyped traits. As we will see, while Victorians attempted to relate different kinds of Otherness to one another, they made both great and subtle distinctions between different marginalized groups.

The literary representation of Jews and Jewishness can serve as a starting point, both a test case and yardstick for comparisons, in our attempt to understand Victorian discourses of Otherness. As Jonathan Freedman argues, “it is the Jew who provides the master trope for otherness that allows one to see the family resemblance between these heterogeneous and proliferating others. It is, in fact, the stereotypical Jew who allows us to see these others as Others at all” (Freedman, 61). Throughout the period, representations of Jews appeared in novels pervasively and disproportionately. Jews and the idea of Jewishness made regular appearances in all areas of cultural production, but they were particularly noticeable in the novel. Every major Victorian novelist, and most minor novelists, included Jewish figures in some of their fictions. The sheer quantity of Jewish representations might strike a historian as surprising, given that demographically speaking Jews were not the single, or even the central, figures of Victorian marginalization: the effort spent maintaining perceived British interests in India or Ireland far outweighed what was put toward the English encounter with its small Jewish population.⁶ Yet Jews figured more prominently in literary and social-scientific literature than did Indians or Irish, at least until the latter part of the century. The disproportionate prominence of Jewish figures was due to their malleability. Victorian writers were concerned less with actual Jews than with what Jews and Jewishness could be made to represent—which was almost anything.

At various times, a Jewish figure was represented as the type of the liberal, the capitalist, the criminal, the parvenu, the socialist, the revolutionary, the degenerate, the conspirator, the immigrant, the monarchist, the repressor of natural drives, or the journalist. Moreover, the term “Jewish” was available for a variety of readings due to Jews’ “category indeterminacy”—their capacity to be understood in diasporic, religious, national, or racial terms. By projecting Victorian social tensions onto Jewish figures, a writer could gain the distance necessary to explore and exploit these tensions. That is to say, when gentile Victorian writers wrote about Jews, they were in fact almost always writing about themselves. What were at stake in such depictions were the nature and limits of English national identity. Victorian writers abstracted Jewishness and figuratively identified it with almost every aspect of the nation.

Although such abstraction and identification routinely occurred in novels, the most famous example probably comes from Culture and Anarchy (1869), Matthew Arnold’s seminal work of social criticism. Arnold defined “Hebraism” as a type of energy, specifically an “energy driving at practice, this paramount sense of the obligation of duty, self-control, and work” (Arnold 129). Arnold sees this abstract characteristic, Hebraism, as one of two rival energies (the other being Hellenism) struggling for predominance within the English national character. Thus, Arnold’s Hebraism has little to do with any historical group of Victorian Jews. Rather, Arnold uses Hebraism to define an aspect of the essence of Englishness for the purposes of his humanist polemic.

As in Arnold’s case, what Jews or Jewishness might mean in any given instance seemed to depend largely on whom a given writer compared them to. This is because national and marginal identities alike are both relational: their constructed meaning depends in large part on the definitions they gain through juxtaposition. When a writer compared the legal standing of

Jews in England to that of Africans in slavery, for example, the figure of the Jew helped the writer reflect on the racial limits of citizenship. When a writer compared the Jewish “colony” in London’s East End to native enclaves in British India, the writer reflected on the contrasts between the administration of Empire at home and abroad. For this reason, the Victorians’ perception of “Jewishness” was constantly shifting. Like every other form of Otherness, Jewishness was not (despite the claims of German Romantic philosophers like Herder and his English counterparts, Scott and Arnold) an essence, a collection of fixed traits or stereotypes that remained stable throughout the period; rather, Jewishness was an overdetermined collection of Victorian projections, fears, hopes, and ideologies, its value in any local instance depending upon the writer’s historical context, ideological predispositions, and comparative framework.

From the standpoint of literary history, understanding a discourse of Otherness like that of Jewishness can help us trace the formation and historical evolution of the novel’s various subgenres. The representation of Others puts pressure not only on a writer’s political ideology but even on the very form in which the writer writes. As we will see below, Jewish characters not only figure prominently in such novelistic subgenres as the historical romance, domestic fiction, the realist novel, and the Condition of England novel, their presence frequently compelled writers to transform their genres into something new. Moreover, these subgenres were themselves transformed by those Victorian novelists who claimed Jewishness as an important part of their identity. Anglo-Jewish writers engaged in a fascinating and complex encounter with the prevailing representations, both assimilating and resisting the ideologies and generic forms produced by the majority culture. Once we understand how these dynamics of assimilation and resistance work for British Jewish writers, we can begin to compare them to analogous (though

in many ways dissimilar) dynamics present in the work of writers from other marginalized groups.

By paying close attention to the way the discourse of Jewishness and other forms of Otherness were interrelated, then, we will be able to raise questions that are at the heart of Victorian studies: to what extent did aesthetic representations, especially in novels, take part in contemporary debates regarding the boundaries of English and British identity? To what extent did political, social, economic, legal, and ideological boundaries constrain the development of literary genres? And to what extent were members of groups classed as Other able to develop “literatures of their own”?⁷

A discourse of Otherness like that of Jewishness cannot fully be comprehended in isolation, apart from discourses on Africans, Indians, Muslims, and Scots. For that reason, I now turn to examine writers who brought their texts to bear on several different Others. If identity is relational, then Victorians’ shifting concept of Jewish identity can best be perceived if we adopt a comparative mode of analysis. Many novelists represented both colonials and Jews. For example, in Vanity Fair Thackeray examined the limits of Britishness primarily through two figures: Jos Sedley, an English son gone to make his fortune in India, and Miss Swartz, an heiress who seems to be the progeny of a Jewish entrepreneur and a West Indian slave. In both cases, Thackeray hints that English wealth and pretension have their source in exploitation and brutality. In a moment I will draw a more extended series of comparisons between the novelistic uses of Jewish and other marginalized discourses, in order to tease out the complex relation between the ideology of Englishness at play in a given literary text and its use of genre. But first, since the ideological issues at stake are much more explicit in non-fiction polemics than in

narrative, let me begin by comparing two political speeches, Macaulay's "Speech on Jewish Civil Disabilities" (1831) and his "Minute on Indian Education" (1835).

As an orator on explicitly ideological issues, Macaulay was compelled to articulate clearly his sense of the relationship between Jews, Indians, and the limits of Englishness (Viswanathan 3-19). In his speeches on Jewish civil disabilities and Indian education, Macaulay laid out a liberal paradigm for how the British empire ought to deal with religious and racial differences at home and abroad. Two contexts seem important here. Most significantly, his speeches took place during and just after the debate over the First Reform Bill, a Bill that, once enacted, transformed the experience of English citizenship by extending the franchise and increasing the numbers of Englishmen who could participate in the political process. It may also be relevant that Macaulay spoke in the wake of the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, which for the first time permitted Catholics to sit in Parliament. The backdrop to both speeches, then, was how far the English concept of citizenship—and the English political and social system—might expand to tolerate and contain religious and racial Otherness.

Presented during the debate over the first of many bills for Jewish Emancipation, Macaulay's speech on Jewish civil disabilities self-consciously placed the issue in the context of religious emancipation and reform. Macaulay compares Jews to Catholics directly, and also to Hindus, Muslims, Parsees, and Huguenots (Macaulay, "Civil Disabilities" 44, 50, 55-56). Mimicking the voice of an MP resistant to including Jews in the polity, Macaulay says, "But where are we to stop, if once you admit into the House of Commons people who deny the authority of the Gospels? Will you let in a Mussulman? Will you let in a Parsee? Will you let in a Hindoo who worships a lump of stone with seven heads?" (44). In his own voice he responds to the resisting "honourable friend" as follows: "I will answer my honourable friend's

question by another. Where does he mean to stop? Is he ready to roast unbelievers at slow fires?" (44). A liberal nation ought not be a brutal one, but rather should learn to tolerate religious differences. In fact, liberal nations have already learned this lesson with other groups, as he reminds the House when he asks, "Why not try what effect would be produced on the Jews by that tolerant policy which has made the English Roman Catholic a good Englishman and the French Calvinist a good Frenchman?" (56).

Nor does Macaulay admit a distinction between an otherness based on religious belief and one based on divinely appointed race. He several times compares Jews to African slaves, saying in one instance, "We treat [Jews] as slaves, and wonder that they do not regard us as brethren" (57). This would seem to suggest that toleration might be applied to Africans as well. True, he maintains a distinction between the civilized and the savage, but he reminds his audience that "in the infancy of civilisation, when our island was as savage as New Guinea, this contemned people [the Jews] had their fenced cities and cedar palaces, their splendid Temple, their fleets of merchant ships, their schools of sacred learning" (58). That is, he shows how the opposition between civilization and savagery might easily be reversed. It is the British who have the history of savagery—and in the fashion of good Whig history these savages have been able to develop and progress. As for the Jews, there is "nothing in their national character which unfits them for the highest duties of civilisation" (58). They, too, might participate in the Whig paradigm of progress and development.

Thus the liberal politician articulates a standard of toleration for religious and racial others when it comes to the rights of citizenship in the nation. We should not imagine, however, that toleration means full participation in the nation. Although Macaulay says, "Let us do justice to them," he does not suggest that they should or will have the same status as us. Doing justice

does not mean dissolving the Christian power structure. Christianity will indeed triumph, but through toleration rather than bigotry, just as it has already “triumphed over the superstitions of the most refined and of the most savage nations” (59). Macaulay adopts a stance that was characteristic of the English discourse of Jewishness from the time of the Readmission of Jews to England by Cromwell in the seventeenth century. Known (somewhat confusingly) as “philo-semitism,” the term did not mean loving Jews, but rather using love to persuade Jews to convert to Christianity. Macaulay’s logic: we will succeed better at converting Jews to Englishness (and Christianity) if instead of brutalizing them we show them how tolerant we can be.⁸

It is remarkable to see how precisely this program of anglicization and philo-semitic conversionism are transferred to the program Macaulay set forth in his Minute on Indian Education four years later. As President of the Committee on Public Instruction in India, he is asked to comment on whether he thinks the Indian school curriculum should focus on traditional Arabic and Sanskrit texts or on English texts. In casting his vote for English, he employs the same rhetoric of tolerant anglicization that he had employed in the speech on Jewish civil disabilities. Just as he believed Jews would benefit by exposure to Christianity in a tolerant context, he believed that Indians would benefit by exposure to English history, philosophy, religion, and literature in their schools. For Macaulay (who admits to having no fluency in any of the languages of India [Macaulay, “Minute” 722]), it is a given that “the dialects commonly spoken among the natives contain neither literary nor scientific information” (721). He is also certain that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia” (722). Yet if these lines sounds like nothing more than the arrogant self-justifications of a member of the hegemonic elite, we should consider that by 1835 the East India Company was beginning to be nationalized and to become an official arm of the British

Government. The Empire was beginning to be formalized. In the Company's employ were hundreds of thousands of native functionaries, whose chance of upward mobility would depend on their capacity to mimic their English higher-ups in learning, fashions, and religion (Bhabha). Although it was clearly informed by cultural bias, Macaulay's program was designed to help these functionaries attain a measure of success within the imperial system. In both his "Minute" and his speech on Jewish disabilities, then, Macaulay tried to ameliorate the marginalized group's suffering while simultaneously ensuring the maintenance of English Christian power.

If there is a difference in Macaulay's programs for Jews and Indians, it is that Jews (perhaps because of their small unthreatening population or their European acculturation) are not conceived to be as great a threat to the power structure as Indians. Macaulay even complains against the existence of a political glass ceiling for Jewish citizens, lamenting that "The Jew may be a jurymen, but not a judge.... He may rule the money-market but he must not be a Privy Councillor" (Macaulay, "Civil Disabilities" 47). Indian schoolchildren, on the other hand, might learn all of Locke and Milton and Newton, but until Independence they would never rise above secondary administrators, and they were not meant to. The realization on the part of anglicized Indians that their glass ceiling was intended to be permanent helped fuel the Mutiny of 1857 (Brantlinger, ch. 7).

This is but one example of the ways polemicists might use Jews and other Others as limit cases to test the borders of Englishness. But it is not only "non-literary" forms that can function in this way. Turning now to novels we will notice immediately that their "literariness" does not prevent them from likewise engaging in the constant conceptualization of national and imperial identity. Novels represented Jews as comparable not only to Africans and Indians, but also to Irish, Scots, and Arab Muslims. In these comparisons two kinds of shifts in meaning take place:

the meaning of both Englishness and Jewishness alters depending on to which group the writer compares the Jews.

In the comparison between Jews and Scots or Irish, the diasporic aspect of Jewishness is paramount. By 1794, when William Godwin wrote his revolutionary novel Caleb Williams, he was already linking Jewishness to England's oppression of its regional Other, the Irish. When Caleb Williams takes on a series of disguises to escape his oppressor, he ends up donning the clothing of both an Irishman and a Jew (Godwin 240, 264). Like his contemporaries the Irish novelist Maria Edgeworth and, over a century later, James Joyce, Godwin correlates Irish and Jewish territorial dispossession. By 1819, Walter Scott was making a similar comparison between Jews' diaspora and the Scots' lack of regional autonomy. In the Waverley series of historical romances, Scott contemplated the past and future of Scottish regional identity in the wake of the 1707 Act of Union that merged Scotland into Great Britain. By ending the series with a Jewish historical romance, Ivanhoe, Scott seemed to imply a parallel between Scottishness and Jewishness, between regional and diasporic identity—a parallel based, perhaps, on both groups' dispossession of territory and sovereignty. Rebecca of Ivanhoe is essentially the Flora MacIvor of the Jews. When in Waverley Flora sings in her hidden bower of the Scots' former national glory and the theft (by the English) of their territory and sovereignty, the narrator calls her the Scots' "Celtic muse" (Scott, Waverley 106), as though she were the Scottish spirit incarnate. Her song contains the essence of the Scottish "national character" (Trumpener, ch. 3). So, too, in Ivanhoe, Rebecca functions as the essence of the Jewish national character, the echo of the Jews' former national glory. During the Battle of Torquilstone, Rebecca actually becomes the text's narrator briefly (Scott, Ivanhoe 314ff.), her voice merged with that of Scott the Scot. It is as if the Scottish and Jewish voices become merged in a sympathy of suffering.

Yet there is one area of discord in Scott's perceptions of the two oppressed groups. In the Waverley series Scott recognizes the costs to Scotland of the Act of Union with England, but he nevertheless uniformly defends the union. For example, at the end of Waverley, the Act of Union is reinforced by the marriage of Edward Waverley (the Englishman) and Rose Bradwardine (the Scot). The personal act of union concretizes and celebrates the political act of union (cf. Trumpener ch. 3). In Ivanhoe, however, Scott ultimately rejects any such act of union between Rebecca and Wilfred, between Jewish and English identity. Rather, despite his love for her, Wilfred tells Rebecca that she quenches chivalry and is "no Christian" (318), even though she is "of England" (299ff.). In the end, Scott has Rebecca go into exile in Granada. Scott claimed in a preface that the marriage of Wilfred and Rebecca would have been ahistorical, but many of his readers thought that Scott was writing, not about the relationship between medieval Jews and Christians, but about the contemporary relationship. His banishment of Rebecca from the English political union seemed to many to contain a statement regarding the prospects of Jews' emancipation in Scott's own time. As we will see below, a number of readers responded by writing romances of their own in which the union of Christian and Jew was made possible by the Jewish woman's conversion.

Scott was not the only writer to perceive a limited relation between the two groups. Although the Victorian Jewish writer Grace Aguilar had her difficulties with Scott, she nonetheless absorbed his lesson of the parallel between regional and diasporic identity. She herself wrote not only a Jewish historical romance patterned after Ivanhoe, but also a Scottish historical romance, The Days of Bruce (1852). She also published her groundbreaking essay, "The History of the Jews of England" (1847), in the radical Edinburgh journal Chambers' Miscellany. Thus, in the comparison between Jews and a regional Other, what writers

emphasized was Jews' statelessness. At issue was the territorial and ethnic borderline that constituted the nation-state.

When comparing Jews and Arabs, what became paramount was the two groups' common history of wandering, their supposed oriental natures, and increasingly, the pseudoscientific "evidence" of their shared racial inheritance. Here what separates the English "race" from other races is at issue. Early in the nineteenth century, Jews and Arab Muslims were both seen as romantic, nomadic, oriental peoples (Said 102).⁹ Cain, Byron's brooding wandering Jew, seems the ideological brother of the Giaour, his brooding wandering Muslim (Cf. Byron 207-246, 881-938). Like gypsies, both Jews and Muslims partook of the spirit of wandering, (although the myth of the "wandering Jew" did have its own separate history and significance). By the 1840s, the young Benjamin Disraeli had absorbed Byron's romanticization of Jewishness and turned it in a nationalistic and racist direction, both in his early historical romance Alroy and in his depiction of the mysterious figure Sidonia in the later novel Tancred. But in the latter he also claims that an Arab is "but a Jew on horseback" (qtd in Said, 102). Here he gives voice to an understanding of semitism, later justified by social Darwinian science, as a racial inheritance shared by Jews and Arabs.

Of all the major Victorian novelists, George Eliot most self-consciously invokes the idea of Jews as oriental when she has the hero of her last novel, Daniel Deronda, choose to wander away from England to found a Jewish nation in the East. But she also sees in Daniel a figure she can use to meditate on colonialism, nationalism, and race. The figure Mordecai, a consumptive prophet who speaks in biblical prose, seems to step out of ancient Israelite history in order to exert a converting influence on Daniel's mind and awake him to the deterritorialized plight of Jews. Mordecai argues that Jews need to "revive the organic centre"—i.e., to recreate a Jewish

homeland on the model of a modern nation-state. Such a suggestion—predating the foundation of political Zionism, or Jewish nationalism, in the 1890s—was imaginable only in the context of colonial expansion, in which new colonies and nations were being added to the map with increasing speed starting in the 1870s. Yet although Daniel undergoes a spiritual marriage of sorts to Mordecai, his conversion is not merely a turning of the mind or heart toward a proto-Zionist nationalism, for after he decides to become Jewish, Daniel finds out that he was in fact a Jew all along: he discovers that he was born to a Jewish mother, the Princess Halm-Eberstein. He does not need to convert once he has discovered the biological truth of his inherited Jewishness. Eliot seems here to accept, at least in part, a racial and somewhat mystical explanation of Jewish inheritance. This racial understanding perhaps explains the most perplexing feature of the text, Daniel's and Mirah's self-exile to the East. While in correspondence Eliot explained that she deliberately set out to use her final novel to raise the level of liberal toleration of Jews, the novel itself seems to suggest quite a different conclusion—namely, that Jews ought to leave England to set up their own nation-state rather than remaining as English citizens. In this, Eliot copied the ending of her friend Harriet Beecher Stowe's sentimental blockbuster, Uncle Tom's Cabin, which she much admired. There, the archetypal liberated blacks set out to found their own colony in Canada. Thus Eliot borrows a plot element to express a racial understanding of Jewishness—an excellent example of how representations of the Other could cross-fertilize one another. So in an unexpected way, a novel by a tolerant writer that set out to question the racial divisions of English society ends up reconfirming those divisions.

From this brief survey, we can see that what I've called Jews' category indeterminacy opens up the possibility of seemingly endless varieties of representation. One important means

of determining which category is being invoked at any given time is to ask which group Jews were being compared to and for which ideological purposes. By using a comparative lens, we can inquire in a sophisticated way how Jews were used in the larger discursive endeavor of shaping English and British identity. Better still, if we assume with Benedict Anderson that national identity itself is never a fixed quantity but is rather a never-realized, ever-shifting set of imaginary blueprints, then perhaps we can ask how each instance of Jewishness functions to help a particular writer articulate a particular national blueprint at a particular moment (Anderson, introduction).

Such representations teach us about more than writers' perceptions of English national identity; they also teach us about the limits of literary genre. There are numerous examples to choose from—the impact of the Jewish parvenu on Trollope's novelistic practice in The Way We Live Now (1875); the introduction of romantic racism into the political novel in Disraeli's Tancred; the formative role of the wandering Jew in Du Maurier's late Victorian novel of degeneration, Trilby (1895); the relation between Jewish folklore and the development of the gothic novel in Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), or the impact of the anti-Semitic association of Jews with vermin on the development of Stoker's Dracula (1897). But for simplicity's sake, I return to two of the above examples—Ivanhoe and Daniel Deronda—to suggest how the introduction of marginalized figures into a text can compel a writer to abandon or transform a genre to which he or she is committed.

As a matter of form, Scott's historical romance should end with the marriage of its hero, Wilfred, and its heroine, Rebecca, the Jewess. The genre typically includes a marriage between a male figure from the dominant group and the female figure from the oppressed group. Their union is symbolic: it represents the transcendence of seemingly immovable barriers to bind the

stratified social order into a unified whole. Yet the romance ends with Rebecca's voluntary departure from England. As Michael Ragussis has demonstrated, Rebecca's departure is a sign that English national identity, strong enough to convert Normans and Saxons into one nation of Englishmen, is not, for Scott, capacious enough to include Jews (Ragussis ch. 3). But this result violates the generic conventions of Scott's own historical romance form, as numerous contemporaries complained. Thus Scott's ideological commitment to Jews' unassimilability compels him to violate his own literary form.

In consequence, a number of Scott's contemporaries wrote romances set, not in the past, but in contemporary England, in which a spiritual Jewish woman leaves her materialistic father's house to convert to Christianity and wed a charismatic Christian suitor (Galchinsky ch. 1). Examples include Edward Bulwer Lytton's Leila, or the Siege of Granada and Thackeray's "Romance Upon Romance," Rebecca and Rowena, among others. These conversionist novels were themselves seen, by British Jews, as troubling. Victorian Jews disliked the conversionists' implication that the Jewish woman was easily convertible, and that Jewish men were materialists. In consequence, Anglo-Jewish writers like Grace Aguilar in The Vale of Cedars (1850) and Marion and Celia Moss in The Romance of Jewish History (1842) wrote historical romances in which a Jewish woman resists the suit of the charismatic Christian and marries a charismatic Jew. Walter Scott's perceived violation of genre thus provoked the publication of a series of counter-texts that took the romance subgenre in new directions. When Scott introduced a Jewish figure into his text, he unwittingly gave rise to a major transformation in one subgenre of narrative.

George Eliot's Daniel Deronda (1876) is likewise a case in which the introduction of Jewishness propels the novelist in generically unforeseen ways. Eliot's novels are usually called

“realist” because they depict plot as a series of probable, everyday sequences of events, present characters with believable psychological depth and inner conflict, and exhibit “organic form,” in which all events tell on all the other events. Yet in the depiction of Jews, Eliot’s realism seems to break down, in terms of all three measures: plot, character, and form. Even before the utopian ending, the plot is filled with numerous coincidences, mysteries and other violations of the probable. For example, when Daniel decides by chance to attend services in a synagogue in Frankfurt, he meets an old man, Joseph Kalonymos, who turns out to have been his grandfather’s best friend, who has a chest of his grandfather’s papers for him, and who immediately recognizes him. Eliot’s messianic figure, Mordecai, seems to be able to foretell future events, which the narrator refers to as his “second sight.”

At the level of character, Eliot’s typical realism is more apparent in some characters than others. She carefully delineates the what she calls the “unmapped territory within” Gwendolyn’s mind (235), demonstrating step by step that Gwendolyn is herself a kind of Wandering Jew, a moral nomad, because she did not grow up “rooted in some spot of a native land” (16). So, too, Eliot’s insight into the psychology of Daniel’s mother is quite penetrating. But when it comes to Mirah, the Jewish singer who is Gwendolyn’s rival for Daniel’s interest and affection, Eliot relies much more on melodrama than realism. And although Mirah’s brother, Mordecai, may have been based on an actual Jewish scholar, Emmanuel Deutsch, his pronouncements sound not like everyday speech, but like speeches either from the Bible or from James Fenimore Cooper romances depicting “noble savages.” He is a Romantic figure of the primitive, an ancient prophet reborn to speak the truth momentarily, only to die the next moment.

Finally, the majestic organic form of a realist novel like Eliot’s Middlemarch, with its careful balances between utopia and critique, seems compromised in the apparently split

structure of this text. Deronda meanders back and forth from what the critic F. R. Leavis called the “Jewish part”—the sections dealing with Daniel’s discovery of his mission to bring Jews back from their wandering into a recreated homeland—to the sections centering on the moral wanderings of Gwendolyn Harleth, the Christian heroine. Leavis was so bothered by the seeming bifurcation of the text that he published an edition with the “Jewish part” cut out, calling it Gwendolyn Harleth (Leavis 79-87, 122-124). Leavis’s perception of the text’s lack of unity was overstated as numerous critics have shown (e.g. Baker; Gallagher; Freedman). But his criticism serves to make us aware that Eliot’s laudable political aim—to increase Victorians’ awareness and toleration of Jews—had literary consequences for the shape of her text. Form and ideology are entirely entangled.

We can see, then, that paying attention to representations of the Other has much to teach us regarding both the construction of English national identity and the historical evolution of literary forms like the novel. Yet if we stop here, our work will still be insufficient to account for the complex interplay of images of Others in nineteenth century England. For what we have said so far has mostly been limited to the anxieties and genres reflected in depictions of the Other by writers in the majority. We have asked little about the anxieties and genres of writers who are members of groups classed as Other. An approach asking only the first kind of question cannot generate a comprehensive contrapuntal knowledge of nationalism, marginalized identities, or the literary attempts to represent them.

To fill in the picture, students of the nineteenth century might also begin to compare the ways in which Jews and other marginalized subjects of the British Empire wrote back in relation to the images of them produced by others. Against the images produced by English Christian writers scholars can juxtapose the products of marginalized subjectivity—Olaudah Equiano’s

slave narrative from 1789 or Mary Prince's slave narrative from 1831, narratives of Indian identity like Hasan Shah's The Dancing Girl from 1790 or Rabindranath Tagore's short stories from the 1890s, Julia Frankau's novel of internalized anti-Semitism, Dr. Phillips: A Maida Vale Idyll from 1887, for example—in order better to conceive of the imagined nation as a series of encounters between major and minor writers. Through such juxtapositions literary and cultural critics can find out to what extent members of marginalized groups identified their own Otherness with the regional, colonial, diasporic, racial, or religious differences of the multiple aliens living in the British dominions. We can find out to what extent Jews, for example, attempted to form political or literary alliances with other marginalized groups. Literary critics and historians can elucidate how minority writers grappled with genres and ideas they inherited from mainstream culture or from other marginalized communities, and to what degree they were able to alter what they had assimilated in order to create new hybridized forms.

Two brief examples of Anglo-Jewish writers' development of new or hybrid forms will serve to illustrate. The first is Israel Zangwill's novel, Children of the Ghetto (1892), recently reissued. In this sprawling novel about the late Victorian Jewish ghetto in the East End of London, Zangwill draws from the sentimental tradition of Dickens. He does so, however, not merely to pay homage to the great novelist, but in order to depict the rich, multifaceted life of the ghetto. He gives us the ghetto's pious paupers and wealthy hypocrites, its multiple languages and profusion of civic and religious organizations, its sweatshop owners and tailor-socialists, its religious reformers and entrenched traditionalists, its skeptics, atheists, Zionists, narcissists, self-haters, and messiahs of every stripe. In short, he puts the Dickensian form and tone to the task of imagining a London far different from the one Dickens described. The depth and texture of Zangwill's knowledge of Jews and Jewishness far outstrips what Dickens is able to achieve in

his portraits of Jewish figures in Oliver Twist (1837-38) and Our Mutual Friend (1864-65). Thus Zangwill puts the Dickensian novel to a use for which it was not originally conceived. The desire to depict what he calls a “peculiar people” (Zangwill, Title Page) compels him to expand and alter the permissible content of the genre.

The second example is Reuben Sachs (1887), a novel of Jewish identity by Amy Levy, a late Victorian Jewish novelist and poet who wrote back against George Eliot’s Daniel Deronda. In the text, Bertie Lee-Harrison, a Christian, visits a Jewish family. After his departure, one of the family remarks that Lee-Harrison was probably “shocked at finding us so little like the people in Daniel Deronda” (Levy, 238). Ridiculing the ending of Eliot’s novel, another member of the family then replies, “Did he expect...to see our boxes in the hall, ready packed and labelled Palestine?” (Levy, 238). Here Levy uses her characters to respond directly to (and resist) the major novelist’s ideological program. But Levy responds to Eliot at a more indirect and subtle level as well—at the level of form. For while Levy adopts a number of elements of the realism for which Eliot is noted, she also moves in a more experimental direction. This is most apparent during the novel’s crisis, when Levy gives us the heroine’s experience not in a connected, probable, realist narrative, but in a series of brief, disconnected, impressions separated by blank space. This technique of rendering the heroine’s psyche anticipates Modernist experiments.¹⁰ In this way, Levy both assimilated and altered the form she inherited from Eliot.

The rich potential of this sort of comparative analysis has only begun to be realized. By employing a relational and contrapuntal methodology, students of Victorian literature can continue the task of tracing continuous, parallel shifts in imperial, national, and marginalized identities, as well as in literary form, throughout the period. Through this process, we can also

succeed in putting the discussion of Jews and other Others back where it came from: the messy, complex, multi-cultural fray that was Victorian England.

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¹ For examples, see Brantlinger, Spivak, Melman, and McClintock.

² I am adapting David Biale's term "counterhistory" for literary use. See Biale.

³ For recent Anglo-Jewish literary criticism of the period, see Cheyette, Galchinsky, and Ragussis, and the essays comprising the “Editor’s Topic” on Anglo-Jewish literature edited by Cynthia Scheinberg in a 1999 issue of Victorian Literature and Culture.

⁴ For an extensive account of such attempts, see Gould.

⁵ For examples of work on Orientalism, see Said and Melman; on Africans, see Gilroy, Dabydeen and Edwards, and Brantlinger; on Indians, see Spivak and Brantlinger; on Scots and Irish, see Trumpener and Davis. On the general phenomenon of diaspora, see Cohen.

⁶ The Anglo-Jewish population comprised fewer than 60,000 members throughout much of the period and only 250,000 by century’s end. For histories of Victorian Jews, see Lipman, Feldman, Katz, and Endelman.

⁷ I am adapting the term that Elaine Showalter first applied to literature written by and for women. Showalter in turn adapted the term from Virginia Woolf’s famous dictum that a woman needs “a room of one’s own” to be able to produce valuable intellectual work.

⁸ On English philo-Semitism, see Katz, Endelman, and Galchinsky.

⁹ It would be interesting to juxtapose the English text’s with a German text that meditated on the relative worth of Jews and Muslims, Gotthold Lessing’s internationally popular drama Nathan the Wise.

¹⁰ I owe this perception to my student Cindy Ash.