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0521811120 - Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture

Cynthia Scheinberg

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Victorian women poets lived in a time when religion was a vital aspect of their identities. Cynthia Scheinberg examines Anglo-Jewish (Grace Aguilar and Amy Levy) and Christian (Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti) women poets, and argues that there are important connections between the discourses of nineteenth-century poetry, gender, and religious identity. Further, Scheinberg argues that Jewish and Christian women poets had a special interest in Jewish discourse; calling on images from Judaism and the Hebrew Scriptures, their poetry created complex arguments about the relationships between Jewish and female artistic identity. She suggests that Jewish and Christian women used poetry as a site for creative and original theological interpretation, and that they entered into dialogue through their poetry about their own and each other's religious and artistic identities. This book's interdisciplinary methodology calls on poetics, religious studies, feminist literary criticism, and little read Anglo-Jewish primary sources.

Cynthia Scheinberg is Associate Professor of English at Mills College in Oakland, California. She has published articles in *Victorian Studies*, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *Victorian Poetry*, and has contributed chapters to *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge, 2000), *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830–1900*, and *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning*.

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Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly syntheses and called into questions the terms of the older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as “background,” feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

This book is dedicated to:

Daniel A. Harris, teacher and friend

Denise and Herbert Scheinberg, parents and friends

Eliahu J. Klein, husband and friend.

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> ix
1 Introduction	i
2 “Sweet singers of Israel”: gendered and Jewish otherness in Victorian poetics	32
3 Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the “Hebraic monster”	62
4 Christina Rossetti and the Hebraic goblins of the Jewish Scriptures	106
5 “Judaism rightly revered”: Grace Aguilar’s theological poetics	146
6 Amy Levy and the accents of minor(ity) poetry	190
<i>Notes</i>	238
<i>Bibliography</i>	256
<i>Index</i>	272

Cambridge University Press

0521811120 - Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

Exposing a work, which has long been the darling object of an author's cares, the treasured subject of his secret thoughts, the companion of private hours, to the eye of a censorious world, must ever be attended with many varied and conflicting feelings, more particularly if that treasured subject be theology . . .

(Grace Aguilar, *The Spirit of Judaism*, 9)

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0521811120 - Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

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0521811120 - Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

xi

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