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978-0-521-86306-3 - The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture

Nadia Valman

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BRITISH LITERARY CULTURE

Stories about Jewesses proliferated in nineteenth-century Britain as debates raged about the place of the Jews in the modern nation. Challenging the emphasis in previous scholarship on antisemitic stereotypes in this period, Nadia Valman argues that the literary image of the Jewess – virtuous, appealing and sacrificial – reveals how hostility towards Jews was accompanied by pity, identification and desire. Reading a range of texts from popular romance to the realist novel, she investigates how the complex figure of the Jewess brought the instabilities of nineteenth-century religious, racial and national identity into uniquely sharp focus. Tracing the Jewess's narrative from its beginnings in Romantic and Evangelical literature, and reading canonical writers including Walter Scott, George Eliot and Anthony Trollope alongside more minor figures such as Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, Grace Aguilar and Amy Levy, Valman demonstrates the myriad transformations of this story across the century, as well as its remarkable persistence and power.

NADIA VALMAN is Lecturer in Victorian Literature at Queen Mary, University of London. She has co-edited *The Image of the Jew in European Liberal Culture, 1789–1914* (2004) with Bryan Cheyette; *Remembering Cable Street: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Society* (1999) and *Philosemitism, Antisemitism and 'the Jews': Perspectives from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (2004), both with Tony Kushner; and *The 'Jew' in late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture: From the East End to East Africa* (2007), with Eitan Bar-Yosef.

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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 synthesis and called into question the terms of 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. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

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For my parents

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[Hers] is a type that sometimes, just now and again, can be so pathetically noble and beautiful in a woman, so suggestive of chastity and the most passionate love combined . . . love that implies all the big practical obligations and responsibilities of human life, that the mere term 'Jewess' (and especially its French equivalent) brings to my mind some vague, mysterious, exotically poetic image of all I love best in woman.

George du Maurier, *The Martian* (1897)

There is in the words 'a beautiful Jewess' a very special sexual signification, one quite different from that contained in the words 'beautiful Rumanian,' 'beautiful Greek,' or 'beautiful American,' for example. This phrase carries an aura of rape and massacre. The 'beautiful Jewess' is she whom the Cossacks under the czars dragged by her hair through the streets of her burning village. And the special works which are given over to accounts of flagellation reserve a place of honor for the Jewess. But it is not necessary to look into esoteric literature . . . the Jewess has a well-defined function in even the most serious novels.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946)

In her, like us, there clashed, contending powers,
Germany, France, Christ, Moses, Athens, Rome.
The strife, the mixture in her soul, are ours

Matthew Arnold, 'Rachel III' (1867)

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