

# *Learning by Heart: Grace Aguilar's Ideal Jewish Education*

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*I*n her nonfiction prose, Anglo-Jewish theologian Grace Aguilar (1816–47) appealed to a mixed readership of Christians and Jews by emphasizing the groups' similar religious values. She reasoned that, despite their doctrinal differences, Jews and Christians alike could agree on the sanctity of their common text: the Hebrew Bible. Her universalist approach to the Bible ensured the success of her theological works with Protestant readers. Aguilar developed an affinity for Christianity early in her life. In 1828 her family moved from London to Devonshire, where she sought out "Christian friends and Christian tools of worship."<sup>1</sup> In the absence of a synagogue, Aguilar attended church services to "satisfy her religious yearnings."<sup>2</sup> Because her writings relate Judaism to Christianity and criticize Jewish legalism, several Victorian journalists dubbed her a "Jewish Protestant." Victorian Christians who read and reviewed Aguilar's publications interpreted her theology as supersessionist, the belief that Christians and Christianity supersede Jews and Judaism in a covenant with God, while Jewish readers objected to her use of these Protestant hermeneutics. Daniel R. Langton calls Aguilar a "relational theologian," explaining that such thinkers are "often regarded as somehow inauthentic or compromised."<sup>3</sup> Scholars continue to assert that her works elide doctrinal differences between Judaism and Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, I argue that Aguilar adopted a Christian vernacular as part of an effort to distinguish Judaism from Christianity. During her

lifetime, several missionary groups formed for the purpose of converting Jews to Christianity. These groups often misrepresented the Hebrew scriptures to Jewish women and children, those who were least likely to be schooled in religious texts and traditions. In response, Aguilar produced several educational tracts, *The Spirit of Judaism* (1842), *The Perez Family* (1843), *The Women of Israel* (1845), and *The Jewish Faith* (1846), each of which articulates the importance of education to Jewish continuity. Like the Christian conversionists, Aguilar reached out to women, whom she judged most receptive to her message. Miriam Burstein sees Aguilar's educational tracts as "rhetorically identical to 'Christian mentor literature' aimed at a female public: She invokes the language of 'woman's mission' [and] argues that mothers bear the primary responsibility for the child's religious education."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Aguilar relied on similarities between Judaism and Christianity to commercialize her educational literature. However, she stipulates that Jews "must know our own [tenets], or we are more than likely to become mentally entangled and confused" by Christianity, concluding, "Where there is so much alike, the points of difference must be very distinctly and clearly traced, or we may be liable to lose them altogether."<sup>6</sup> Aguilar sought to maintain a clear distinction between Judaism and Christianity to ensure the continuation of Jewish life in Europe.

Aguilar's pedagogy charges women with teaching Judaism to children. Because "the commandment of Torah study [is] incumbent on males only, formal Orthodox Jewish educational frameworks for girls were a rarity as late as the early twentieth century."<sup>7</sup> Aguilar saw this gap in education as an opportunity to create new leadership roles for women and new educational experiences for girls. She argued that the cornerstone of Jewish education should be the Bible, rather than the Talmud or other rabbinical texts, as is customary, because the Bible is Judaism's most universally accessible book. Thus, she helped to launch "women's leadership in vernacular, Bible-centered, and faith-centered public education for Jewish youth," an educational model that later became widespread in nineteenth-century Jewish America.<sup>8</sup> Aguilar adapted

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Evangelical beliefs about the sanctity of womanhood, turning Jewish mothers into formal educators and transforming the traditional mode of Jewish education with a focus on affective identification. She presents her curriculum not only as a viable defense against conversionist manipulation but also as the key to reinforcing Jewish communal identity amid increasing assimilation and intermarriage.

### **A Christian Nation?**

For many nineteenth-century British politicians, clergymen, and writers, the Jews were Britain's most visible (and therefore troublesome) minority. If other groups such as Africans, Indians, or Arabs existed merely as colonial fantasies or figures of historical romance, then Jews lived beyond the printed page. Jews' visibility in Britain steadily increased after their readmission by Cromwell in 1656, with immigration reaching its zenith at the end of the nineteenth century. However, their rights were curtailed. So, as Parliament debated the prospect of Jewish emancipation, Protestant clergymen and conversion societies worked to solve "the Jewish question" by gaining conquests for Christianity—no matter how dubious the converts.

The Jewish path to citizenship officially began in 1753 and spanned more than a century. Introduced by Prime Minister Henry Pelham and enacted by his brother and successor, the Duke of Newcastle, the Jewish Naturalization Act of 1753 released Jews from taking Anglican sacraments before the passage of private acts of naturalization. According to Todd Endelman, the highly unpopular "Jew Bill" was not "an act of general naturalization, designed to promote the emigration of Jews to England," but rather, it was "a favor to some of the Sephardi mercantile elite who had been active in supporting the financial policies of the ministry."<sup>9</sup> The law "still prohibited them from holding many forms of property and public offices."<sup>10</sup> The Jewish Naturalization Act passed but, amid a flurry of opposition pamphlets and articles, was quickly repealed. Jewish religious leaders and notable businessmen began seriously campaigning for emancipation in the mid-nineteenth century. With the

repeal of the Test Act in 1828, “the Tories insisted on replacing the sacramental test [...] with a declaration of loyalty that included the phrase ‘upon the faith of a Christian.’”<sup>11</sup> Naturally, such language continued to keep Jews from holding public office. Following Catholic Emancipation in 1829, Robert Grant brought the first Jewish Emancipation Bill to Parliament in 1830. Jewish emancipation provoked parliamentary debates until 1871, when the last vestiges of Jewish civil disabilities were stripped away with the abolition of the Universities Tests Act, allowing Oxford, Cambridge, and Durham universities to award degrees to non-Anglicans.

As politicians were considering Jewish emancipation, Evangelicalism was teaching that England was a fundamentally Christian nation, thereby branding Jews as outsiders. To ameliorate the Jews’ condition, Evangelicals formed groups like the London Society For Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews and the London Missionary Society, the latter having been originally established to convert colonial subjects abroad.<sup>12</sup> These societies tried to convince Jews of the truth of Christianity, usually through essays and novels alleging to show the weaknesses of Jewish scriptural arguments. These tracts often included “details of Jewish liturgy, rituals, and household practices. [...] Conversionists thus hoped to lure Jews to Christianity utilizing the Jewish religion.”<sup>13</sup> They specifically targeted Jewish women “as the weak link among the Jews, arguing that their oppression by Jewish men, their lack of Jewish education, and their innate spirituality made them natural candidates for conversion.”<sup>14</sup> Conversion tales, including Amelia Bristow’s *Rosette and Miriam* (1837), Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Leila* (1837), and the anonymous novels *The Converted Jewess* and *Leila Ada*, typically featured “an unhappy Jewess who rejects the law of her father, learns the spiritual joy of true religion from a Christian woman friend, and is relentlessly persecuted while she clings to it.”<sup>15</sup> Evangelical writers saw Jewish women as particularly amenable to persuasion and open to conversion.<sup>16</sup>

Beyond the province of a few notorious groups like the London Society, conversionism played a part in parliamentary debates about

Jewish emancipation. Some politicians reasoned that *if* granted citizenship, Jews *would* convert to Christianity. However, others “questioned the Jews’ allegiance to a ‘Christian nation’ and refused to grant them full civil and political liberties *until* they converted.”<sup>17</sup> Michael Ragussis argues, “The ideology of conversion was maintained, even supported, by the idea that only when once converted could the Jews become English citizens with all the civic and political privileges of their neighbors.”<sup>18</sup> Consequently, parliamentary speeches and writings portrayed Jews as strangers in England, presenting Judaism as incompatible with developing definitions of Englishness. For example, Evangelical Member of Parliament Sir Robert Inglis told the House of Commons, “The Jews were aliens, not in the technical and legal sense [...] but in the popular sense of the word: they were aliens because their country and their interests were not merely different, but hostile to our own.”<sup>19</sup> For Inglis, admitting Jews to Parliament would “separate Christianity itself from the State.”<sup>20</sup> Unlike Jewish public figures who believed that their community could (and did) maintain their distinctiveness while participating in British life, many Christians saw conversion as the necessary first step in the Jews’ radical assimilation.<sup>21</sup>

While Ragussis foregrounds the ideology of conversionism in his treatment of these debates, Endelman emphasizes the liberal argument for toleration, but as I will show, both are part of the same paradigm. In “Civil Disabilities of the Jews” (1831), liberal Member of Parliament Thomas Macaulay counters arguments that Jews, by virtue of their difference, should not be allowed to own property or serve in Parliament. Macaulay notes religious differences between Jews and Christians, but asks “why a man should be less fit to exercise power because he wears a beard, because he does not eat ham, because he goes to the synagogue on Saturdays instead of going to the church on Sundays?”<sup>22</sup> He sees these differences in religious, not racial, terms and therefore as surmountable in liberal, tolerant England. Macaulay agrees that the “points of difference between Christianity and Judaism have very much to do with a man’s fitness to be a bishop or a rabbi” but not “a magistrate, a legislator, or a minister of

finance.”<sup>23</sup> In the secular sphere, he reasoned, Jews and Christians are not so different.

Macaulay challenged the idea of England as a Christian nation. His opponents rejected the prospect of Jews legislating for Christians, but in his essay Macaulay clarifies “that a legislature composed of Christians and Jews should legislate for a community composed of Christians and Jews.”<sup>24</sup> In these debates, the liberal position held that recognizing Catholics and Dissenters as full members of the political nation warranted that same recognition of Jews. Britain’s religious dynamic had at that point already changed and, as Macaulay observes, differences between Jews and Anglicans were not greater than those separating Anglicans from Catholics, the latter group having achieved political emancipation in 1829. Showing how distinctions between religions had already begun to collapse, Macaulay encourages Englishmen to tolerate non-Christians so that they might “convert” them into British citizens.<sup>25</sup>

Some claimed that Jews could never be integrated into the British nation because their fundamental and immutable difference undermined the Christian foundation of British society. But essayist and social commenter William Hazlitt cites the Catholic and Dissenting precedent in his 1831 essay “The Emancipation of the Jews,” in which he suggests that old-fashioned prejudices were thwarting Jewish emancipation efforts. He attributes certain anti-Semitic stereotypes—such as hostility, exclusiveness, rootlessness, and ignorance—to the Jews’ lowly condition in Britain:

Shut out any class of people from the path to fair fame, and you reduce them to grovel in the pursuit of riches and the means to live. [...] You treat him with obloquy and contempt, and wonder that he does not walk by you with an erect and open brow. [...] You tear people up by the roots and trample on them like noxious weeds, and then make an outcry that they do not take root in the soil like wholesome plants. You drive them like a pest from city to city, from kingdom to kingdom, and then call them vagabonds and aliens.<sup>26</sup>

The notion "of Jewish exclusivity was widely believed in the non-Jewish Victorian world," even by friends of the Jewish community.<sup>27</sup> Throughout his essay, Hazlitt calls for the Jews' integration into British life without *explicitly* demanding their conversion, preaching tolerance of Jewish difference.

But perhaps unwittingly, both Macaulay and Hazlitt echoed various conversionist arguments. According to Bryan Cheyette, Macaulay wanted to harness Jewish financial power for the good of England. From Macaulay's perspective, the state could only utilize Jewish money if Jews were given civil rights, which would transform them into "'good citizens' [who] 'meet the expectations of gentiles.'"<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Cheyette sees Hazlitt's support for emancipation as millenarian, arguing that he unites "the 'progress of civilization' with a specific Jewish messianic purpose within Christendom."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Hazlitt repeats a common conversionist complaint: "That the Jews, as a people, persist in their blindness [to Christ's salvific power] and obstinacy is to be lamented."<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, emancipation debates revolved around the idea that the Jews could more easily be "converted" into British citizens if they converted to Christianity.

Aguilar's work underscores the conversionary function of much of the political support for Jewish emancipation. She believed Jews could become patriotic British citizens *without* converting to Christianity. In "The History of the Jews in England" (1853), she laments how "Jews are still considered aliens and foreigners; supposed to be separated by an antiquated creed and peculiar customs from sympathy and fellowship," and she highlights the injustice of Jewish political disabilities as "the last relic of religious intolerance" in Britain.<sup>31</sup> Aguilar hoped to prove to her countrymen that Jews could integrate into British society; in fact, she repeatedly argued that their integration was complete in all but British law.

Aguilar vocalized Jews' claims to British cultural identity, but she also set them apart from Christian Britons. She takes up the issue of Judaism's distinctiveness in *The Spirit of Judaism*, a defense against Christian conversionism. While she clearly distinguishes between Catholic inquisitors' torturous methods of converting Jews and British

Protestants' misguided though well-meaning conversionist pressures, Aguilar points out that Protestants and Catholics share the same theological impulse to proselytize. In light of Christian conversion efforts, she urges Jews to preserve their distinctive religion: "We are daily in danger of being lured to desert our faith, or of being called upon to arise and defend our belief, not against the sword of slaughter, but against that kindly though mistaken zeal which would endeavour to convince and to convert, by the means of that very book we have wilfully neglected."<sup>32</sup> Condemning Christians' pernicious use of the Hebrew scriptures as a means of converting uneducated Jews, she implores Jews to study their own unique religious texts and traditions. Aguilar saw a need for Jewish educational materials, so she took it upon herself to write books for educational purposes.

### **Jewish Literacy in Britain**

Throughout the nineteenth century, Jewish education in Britain was unorganized and ineffective for several reasons. First, educational opportunities for the lower classes were limited. Missionary groups "took advantage of the inadequacy of communal provision for the education of the poor to establish free schools in or near Jewish neighborhoods."<sup>33</sup> Poor children were sometimes persuaded to attend missionary schools because the teachers offered them food and clothing. Jewish communal leaders decided that, without formal schooling, their lower-class coreligionists were vulnerable to conversionist pressures, "leading to the establishment of communal schools that combined secular and religious instruction."<sup>34</sup> The largest, the Jews' Free School, opened in 1817, and smaller schools included the Talmud Torah, the Jews' Hospital, the Westminster Jews' Free School, the Jews' Infant Schools, and the Jewish Girls' Free School. The Jews' Free School, in particular, "was able to provide large numbers of the poor with a rudimentary secular and religious education," but, in general, "the students who attended these schools emerged with a very limited knowledge of [either] religious [or] secular subjects."<sup>35</sup>

Second, interreligious differences prevented the formation of organized schooling for the upper classes. Most of the community agreed with the need for free schools but agreed on little else. For example, the orthodox wanted to open a private Jewish day school in London, thinking it could provide comprehensive religious instruction, ensure ritual observance, and strengthen their children's commitment to Judaism. Conversely, the reformers wanted to limit religious instruction, and they were largely unconcerned with their children's ignorance of Jewish rituals and texts. In fact, reformers rejected proposals for a private Jewish day school; they believed it would attract unwanted attention and thus hinder their achievement of full emancipation and integration into British society.<sup>36</sup> Issues of religious distinctiveness and separateness, "and tension between those happy with these developments and those opposed to them, often led to open fights within the various Western Jewish communities."<sup>37</sup>

While some were content with the prospect of completely secular curricula, others stressed the importance of religious education, especially amid mounting concerns about assimilation. Well-to-do orthodox Jews were usually unwilling to enroll their sons in elite public schools, where "chapel attendance and New Testament instruction were required and the observance of the dietary laws, the Sabbath, and the festivals almost impossible."<sup>38</sup> So, in 1799 Hyman Hurwitz, a Talmudist and scholar from Posen, founded the first Jewish boarding school in Britain. The curriculum included both secular and Jewish subjects. Leopold Neumegen, a Hebraist and educator also from Posen, became headmaster of Hurwitz's school in 1821, and it remained open until Neumegen's death in 1875.<sup>39</sup> Hoping to provide a Jewish alternative to Christian public schools, Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler opened a public day school "for the sons of our middle class" in 1855. It offered instruction in both religious and secular subjects but "was never able to attract broad support and closed in 1879."<sup>40</sup> Altogether, "Jewish education in London, in all its forms, achieved a very low level of success."<sup>41</sup>

Journalists and other public figures regularly complained about the state of Jewish education in Britain. Joseph Mitchell and Marcus Bresslau,

editors of the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1844, “wanted to see Jewish education strengthened to avoid the drift towards trimming Judaism to suit the times.”<sup>42</sup> They believed the new Reform movement was poised to steer unlearned Jews away from traditional Judaism by altering religious services and adopting Christian worship styles.<sup>43</sup> In 1845 a writer for the *Voice of Jacob* attributed “the comparative ignorance respecting Judaism which pervades all classes of our Jewish population” to ineffective communal education.<sup>44</sup> Mainly, “The religious education of the masses focused on reading the prayers in Hebrew and translating them into English,” with the Jews’ Free School teaching Hebrew only by rote.<sup>45</sup> Because of this near universal method of instruction, many British Jews could not actually read Hebrew. Parents were usually satisfied if their children could at least recite their prayers from memory.<sup>46</sup> Concerned for the future of Jewish life in Britain, Jewish intellectuals and communal leaders called for an educational reformation.

Aguilar proposed several solutions to these problems. First, she demanded that Jewish institutions use English for the benefit of those not fluent in Hebrew. *The Spirit of Judaism* argues that holy works should be printed in vernacular languages, which was, at the time, a controversial position. Traditionally, Jewish texts are written in Hebrew or Aramaic, the languages of Judaism’s educated élite; however, Aguilar believed in making the texts available to all Jews. Invoking the Evangelical ideal of simple piety, she claims, “The Hebrew poor [...] need religion, simple, heartfelt, yet ever guiding religion; and this can only be obtained by *teaching* them their *English* Bibles.”<sup>47</sup> In *The Jewish Faith*, she points out that Christian children had access to numerous educational resources: Christian writers, both men and women, published educational books, and churches employed clergymen to provide free religious instruction. But Jewish children had fewer options. Aguilar explains, “There is [...] only] one Synagogue in the metropolis, where every Sabbath there are sermons in the vernacular idiom, tending to remove doubt, answer enquiry, satisfy feeling, and confirm belief.”<sup>48</sup> Without resources in vernacular languages, Jewish children, less educated in religion than their Christian peers, might turn to Christianity for guidance.

Rabbi Isaac Leeser, editor and publisher of two of Aguilar's books, *The Spirit of Judaism* and *The Jewish Faith*, disagreed with her about the religious use of vernacular languages to some extent. Leeser encouraged English-language instruction for Jewish children and later produced the first English translation of the Hebrew Bible, but in his response to *The Spirit of Judaism*, he insisted that because Jews are the "inheritors of the Hebrew language no less than the Scriptures, it is evidently our duty to make ourselves, if possible, familiar with the original."<sup>49</sup> But Leeser misjudged Aguilar's regard for Hebrew. She studied it with David Aaron de Sola, senior minister and cantor of London's Bevis Marks synagogue, and later taught it at her own boarding school.<sup>50</sup> She simply saw the use of English as one of two antidotes to declining religious knowledge.

Aguilar also condemned rote methods of teaching Hebrew. She worried that conversionists might exploit the ignorance of poor Jews, who barely had a "superficial knowledge of the Hebrew tongue, just sufficient to repeat their prayers and blessings at stated hours."<sup>51</sup> So, Aguilar suggests that children develop native fluency in Hebrew. Envisioning a future wherein Jews of all nations speak Hebrew conversationally, she claims, "This end cannot be attained if the Hebrew child is merely taught to read and translate his prayers, as was formerly the case, and his aptitude in the language judged according to his proficiency in following the service of the Synagogues."<sup>52</sup> Aguilar believed that increased Hebrew fluency would strengthen Jewish children's sense of communal identity by enabling them to communicate with each other more easily across vernacular language barriers.

Aguilar rejected rote learning because she associated religious literacy with emotional identity. If Jewish children cannot read Hebrew, and do not value routine rituals, their required daily prayers will seem meaningless to them, and they will grow tired of praying in a foreign language, "divesting the sacred words from all holiness."<sup>53</sup> In *The Spirit of Judaism*, she urges children to remember that they take on an "awful responsibility" each time they recite the Shema, admonishing those who disregard the importance of Judaism's central prayer.<sup>54</sup> If properly

educated, children will naturally develop an emotional connection to Judaism, rather than feel “conscious they are doing a necessary duty, but utterly unconscious of the nature of him they thus address, well versed in traditional lore, but wholly ignorant of the spirit of the Bible.”<sup>55</sup> Interested in safeguarding Jewish life for future generations, her educational program prescribed an emotional connection to Judaism’s central text, the Hebrew Bible, rather than “traditional lore,” or rabbinical literature. Adherence to religious formalities without emotional conviction will, Aguilar believed, eventually alienate Jews from both culture and religion.

### **A Return to the Bible**

Hoping to reform modern Judaism for the benefit of women and children, Aguilar wrote and published educational tracts that promoted the Evangelical model of education, which prioritized the Bible over exegetical tradition. Evangelical women were advised to study the Bible so that they could in turn teach their children religion as it is revealed in biblical texts.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, Aguilar encouraged Jewish women to read and interpret the Hebrew Bible for themselves in order to teach Judaism. By focusing on the Bible, she circumvents Talmudic prohibitions against women’s studying rabbinical literature, the writings that form the basis for most Jewish religious practice.<sup>57</sup> Although Aguilar was herself orthodox, her educational tracts devalue the interpretational authority of the Talmudic rabbis, instead highlighting women’s unique emotional connection to the Bible.<sup>58</sup>

Aguilar was likely influenced by the rhetoric of Britain’s Evangelical Revival, which vilified the Talmud, a set of texts comprising rabbinical discussions of scripture, and considered the Bible to be authoritative. Evangelicals often mobilized this rhetoric in their zeal to convert undereducated Jews. For example, the conversionist periodical *Israel’s Watchman; A Hebrew Christian Magazine* implores Jewish women to throw off “the shackles of Rabbinism.”<sup>59</sup> As Nadia Valman explains, “The critique of ‘Rabbinism’ reflected Evangelical distrust of the mediation of God’s word, and is evident in [...] conversionist narratives, [...] which

frequently depict a Bible-reading heroine persecuted by a pedantic and unspiritual rabbi.”<sup>60</sup> Aguilar recommended the use of the Bible, not rabbinical literature, in Jewish educational programs, especially as a means of combating conversionism. Elaborating on her theories of religious education for poor Jewish children, she argues that religious knowledge “will not come untaught, nor can its mild consoling lustre beam from the trammels of tradition, which must increase in incomprehensible obscurity with each new generation.”<sup>61</sup> By “tradition” Aguilar means the Talmud, texts that she believes will alienate Jews from Judaism, owing to their lengthy explanations and circular logic.

At the same time, the growing Reform movement also rejected the exalted place of the Talmud in Judaism. Langton claims, “It is certainly reasonable to read [the Bibliocentricity of the Reform movement] as evidence for the influence of Evangelical Christian critique of Judaism, which was also vehemently anti-Talmudic.”<sup>62</sup> The early reformers denied the divinity of Talmudic texts, situating them beneath the Torah in terms of authority. David Woolf Marks, the rabbi of Britain’s first Reform synagogue, declared in 1851 that the “Rabbins were but uninspired mortals” and thus prone to mortal error.<sup>63</sup> For Marks, the Talmud was the product of human, not divine, authorship and therefore not binding. Similarly, Aguilar advises Jews to look to the Bible for guidance, given that rabbinical writings are, to her, “wanderings from the true and only law, the inventions of man and not the words of God.”<sup>64</sup>

But despite their similarities, Aguilar and Marks differ in several important ways. Aguilar’s pedagogy foregrounds the use of biblical texts, but she was not a Reform Jew, in either a Victorian or a contemporary sense. She did not completely reject rabbinical rulings; instead, she believed that validation for all aspects of rabbinical Judaism are found in the Bible. In fact, her works use Talmudic sources to justify comprehensive religious education for women and girls. Moreover, Langton asserts that because her “reforming programme for Judaism drew heavily upon Christian influences, [...] it is worth stressing her independence from the Anglo-Jewish Reform movement,” clarifying that

while Marks “might have shared Aguilar’s sensitivity to an Evangelical, Bible-based, anti-rabbinic Christian critique of Judaism, [...] he did not share Aguilar’s sense of a shared spiritual community with Christianity.”<sup>65</sup> Unlike the German Reform movement, which sought to substantially alter traditional Judaism, “What Anglo-Jewish Reform sentiments existed were often ‘Orthodoxy lite,’ with innovations confined to issues such as English-language preaching, the introduction of organ music, and increased decorum—some of which were also incorporated into Orthodox practice.”<sup>66</sup> Rather than recreating the very foundation of Judaism, Aguilar simply utilized Evangelical rhetoric and practices to universalize Judaism for the benefit of unlearned Jews, supporting some reforms without sacrificing her commitment to traditional religiosity.

Christian theologians since Paul have criticized traditional Judaism for its legal system. Some believe that Judaism is exceedingly legalistic and therefore heartless and that Jews should be pitied for their stubborn adherence to their laws. As Burstein observes, “In the nineteenth century, Judaism was commonly defined not by its spirituality but by its antispirituality, its elevation of apparently meaningless ritual over true religious content.”<sup>67</sup> Understanding religion in terms of Paul’s law-versus-love paradigm, Victorian conversionists claimed that Judaism emphasized rituals over spirituality, calling orthodox Jews “Pharisees” (a proto-rabbinical sect from the Second Temple period who were often seen as hypocritical and self-righteous). Many Evangelicals saw Christianity as founded on love and Judaism as rooted in law, and they made it their mission to introduce New Testament perspectives on love to potential Jewish converts.

Aguilar understood the consequences of this debate, and she tried to appeal to other Jews by using similar rhetoric. For example, *The Spirit of Judaism* invokes the Pharisees to chastise those who follow the letter of Jewish law but have no common sympathy for their fellow man:

And yet does the presumptuous and haughty Hebrew,  
imitating the Pharisee of old, dare to say, [non-Jews’]  
prayers are less acceptable than his? The offerings of the

meek and lowly, the earnest in the performance of his Maker's will, in his duty to his fellow-men, these are acceptable and of sweet savour unto Him, who judgeth not as man judgeth, whatever may be the creed which dictates them. It is the spirit which He regardeth, demanding obedience according to the light His wisdom hath bestowed. If more light, more holiness, have been given us, more from us will be required; and the self-satisfied Hebrew may perhaps have cause to envy the meek and lowly Christian or Moslem, he has in his heart despised.<sup>68</sup>

Aguilar insists that God values the spirit of a petitioner's prayers rather than the specific forms or rituals of prayer. Here Leeser interjects that Aguilar's views of the Pharisees will only validate Christian beliefs about Judaism and will harm the religion's reputation in her largely Christian society. He clarifies that "they may have been overstrict in their observances; but honest they were, and I do not think that they ever inculcated illiberality towards others; on the contrary they taught, that the Lord does not withhold the reward due to any creature."<sup>69</sup> Leeser maintains that Aguilar is too prejudiced against rabbinic Judaism. She does minimize the role of the Talmud in Judaism as part of her educational platform, but it does not follow that she also agreed with Evangelical missionaries or the reformers that orthodox Judaism is emotionless.

By deemphasizing ritual observance, Aguilar instead stresses the importance of love and emotion in Judaism. In *The Spirit of Judaism*, she distinguishes between the so-called forms and spirit of Judaism, underscoring its spiritual dimensions and rebuffing Evangelical claims about aloof Jews and their passionless religion. In *The Jewish Faith*, she praises those who are "no longer satisfied tacitly to believe, and to go on from year to year the mere formalist, which is unhappily the case with many."<sup>70</sup> In *The Women of Israel*, she advises Jews to "pray to Him in our hearts as well as with our lips; we must *think* individual prayer as well as those public petitions framed for us."<sup>71</sup> In *The Perez Family*, she asserts,

“The Jew must have faith [...] believe God hears and will answer, or his prayers, however fervent, are of no avail.”<sup>72</sup> For Aguilar, then, standard Hebrew prayers mean nothing without emotional intent. In each of these examples, she depicts love and emotion as authentic to Judaism.

Because the Evangelical view of Judaism as heartless fueled conversionist activity, Aguilar believed Jewish education should aspire to engage children’s emotions. *The Spirit of Judaism* argues, “The spirit of piety [should be] inculcated in the minds of children.”<sup>73</sup> According to Aguilar, the Shema, a daily prayer which begins, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one,” embodies this ideal, but she warns against mechanical recitation. Important as a tool for reinforcing Jewish identity, the Shema is “the first [prayer] taught to our children; either in Hebrew or in English, [it is] the first ideas of prayer which the infant mind receives.”<sup>74</sup> Aguilar then expands her purview to include adults, the inheritors of childhood education. The Shema ceases to serve its important function when, as adults, the words “slip from our lips, so heedlessly, so lifelessly. [...] The thoughts wander, the heart is deadened.”<sup>75</sup> She asks Jews to remember that the Shema is a summary of God’s law, hoping the reminder will engage the emotions of the petitioner.<sup>76</sup> For Aguilar, emotionless repetition of prayers might lead to the acceptance of Christianity because that religion, not Judaism, is viewed as loving. She responds, “The God the Nazarene emphatically calleth love; this is their God and OUR God.”<sup>77</sup> In *The Perez Family*, the character Rachel Perez assures her niece, Sarah, “that our God is a God of love and compassion, as infinite as His holiness.”<sup>78</sup> In *The Jewish Faith*, the character Inez, a pious Jewish woman, writes to Annie, a Jewish girl considering conversion, and says, “the religion our Father desired Moses to teach, is a religion of love, and in love only should be taught, as in love received.”<sup>79</sup> Inez teaches Annie that “if we once inculcate in the hearts of our youth the spirituality and the comfort of our holy religion, we shall have nothing whatever to fear in our closest intercourse with Christians.”<sup>80</sup> If Jews and Christians alike view God as loving, then Christians have fewer reasons to offer Jews for conversion to Christianity.

But rather than eliminate Jewish rituals altogether, Aguilar argues, Jews should use them to enhance their spirituality. Critics have said that Aguilar’s arguments sometimes “sound like the familiar classic Anglo-Reform Jewish argument which set spirit against form, [...] but in fact Aguilar went on to argue that the ideal was obedience to God’s ordinances, including external forms, through the power of the spirit.”<sup>81</sup> Discussing the practice of laying tefillin during prayer, that is, when the petitioner dons sets of black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with Torah verses, she asserts that “all these directions, trifling as they may seem, are but unanswerable proofs [...] [of] how entirely and completely religion, the spirit of religion, the whisperings of the eternal, was to be associated with the actions of man.”<sup>82</sup> Though form and spirit converge in this process, she places supreme importance on the spiritual value of prayer, arguing, “It is not the mere obedience to the letter of the law, the mere adoption of ancient dress in the hour of prayer, which will render our prayers acceptable.”<sup>83</sup> Aguilar does not reject form; instead, she subordinates it to spirit; hence the primacy of the Bible, as opposed to commentaries, in her educational program. In the absence of educational books for Jewish children, she advocates for a return to the Bible, the source of “home-speaking, heart-appealing prayers.”<sup>84</sup> In the nineteenth century, “the figure of the heart [was] a metonym for femininity or femaleness, a sign of heightened sensibility and emotion [...] which stands in opposition to the more abstracted intellect, which is cast as a specifically male quality.”<sup>85</sup> By emphasizing emotion, Aguilar characterizes Judaism as feminine, thus giving prominence to Jewish women.

### **The Heart of Judaism**

Halakha (Jewish law) requires men to study religious texts. Traditionally, institutions like synagogues help men to instruct their sons in commentaries, prayers, and laws. Many interpret halakha as exempting women from men’s obligations; consequently, institutions have sometimes neglected girls’ education. Historically, Jewish girls’ education was limited to the home, where “mothers acquired expertise in various

realms of the law such as those dealing with the dietary laws, the laws of purity, and the Sabbath” and taught these lessons to their daughters.<sup>86</sup>

Aguilar’s educational tracts hold mothers responsible for the comprehensive religious education of children, a perspective she might have drawn from her own cultural background. Her ancestors were Sephardi Jews who fled the Inquisition, and she wrote several stories about the *anusim*, Spanish and Portuguese Jews who were forcibly converted to Catholicism in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, outwardly adhering to Catholic rites but practicing Judaism in secret. At this time, many *conversas*, female converts, remained devoted to Judaism, often without the approval of their husbands.<sup>87</sup> In fact, *conversas* risked their lives to educate their children in Judaism. Already leaders in their families, mothers became religious teachers, turning their homes into centers of Jewish life and learning. The Inquisition and the 1492 Expulsion of the Jews left “no Jewish community available to provide teachers, rabbis, schools, or texts, [so] the only institution that remained more or less intact and viable was the family.”<sup>88</sup> *Conversas*’ educational methods relied on their strengths as household managers. Experienced in practical teaching, they incorporated oral transmission and active learning into their curricula and used their homes as educational facilities, “the only feasible locale for clandestine observance.”<sup>89</sup> In this way, mothers helped to preserve Jewish life through centuries of persecution.

Aguilar received both religious and secular instruction, which was unusual for several reasons. Because Victorian society privileged boys, “girls received only desultory intellectual training from tutors or governesses, or else they attended school fitfully.”<sup>90</sup> Because Jewish boarding schools excluded girls, Jewish families either sent their daughters to private schools or educated them at home.<sup>91</sup> Typically, girls and young women learned household skills and accomplishments at home, hoping to make the best possible marriages.<sup>92</sup> According to Michal Shahaf, “Women’s education was less structured and more diverse than that of men. It was not customary to include the study of the Talmud or rabbinic literature in their curriculum, but collections of meditations, prayer books

or devotional exercise books and, of course, the Bible, were included."<sup>93</sup> They might have also learned scripture, history, literature, philosophy, and reading and writing English and European languages. Girls were not usually taught Hebrew, therefore "Hebrew and Jewish literature were included in accordance with the preferences of the teachers, fathers or tutors."<sup>94</sup> Aguilar's father taught her to read Hebrew, and they studied Jewish histories and religious commentaries together.<sup>95</sup>

At this time, Evangelical Christians represented women as spiritually superior to men, leading clergymen and others to identify women as the moral guardians of society.<sup>96</sup> Charged with inculcating morality, "Christian women dramatically enhanced their role in religious education."<sup>97</sup> As Shahaf explains, "Writing was one version of the woman's ultimate mission as teacher and educator, responsible for moral guidance."<sup>98</sup> Victorian Jews agreed with Evangelical Christians about women's spirituality, in part because some Talmudic sages and later rabbinic commentators determined that women are naturally more spiritual than men.<sup>99</sup> However, some Jews interpret women's elevated spirituality as prohibiting their performance of ritual acts like Torah study.<sup>100</sup> Religious women's studying and teaching can thus be viewed as transgressive. Consequently, Victorian Jewish women pursued their leadership goals by embracing Evangelical beliefs about womanhood. For example, Rebecca Gratz authored a curriculum for the Hebrew Sunday School system; Abigail Lindo and Miriam Mendes-Belisario published Hebrew-English lexicons; and in 1841 Charlotte Montefiore began the Cheap Jewish Library, a series of didactic works marketed to lower-class Jews.<sup>101</sup> In each case, the product was intended for educational use. Montefiore, in particular, stressed the educational nature of her project.<sup>102</sup> Aguilar's *Perez Family*, written for Montefiore's series in 1843, features women learning and teaching religious texts. A proponent of women's education, Aguilar claims to have written for educational purposes, and she even became known as the "Moral Governess of the Hebrew Family."

Following the publication of *The Perez Family*, Aguilar increasingly called for the production of religious educational materials for Jewish

girls. In *The Jewish Faith*, she observes, “For our young men, there are the works of our ancient sages; there are ministers and teachers to instruct them in their obsolete and difficult languages, and explain their often puzzling and metaphysical sense. There is a vast fund of Hebrew learning and theology open to them,” but not to women; rather, “books are needed on which the mind and heart may rest,—and more especially for our FEMALE YOUTH. For them, there is literally no help in the way of vernacular religious literature.”<sup>103</sup> According to Aguilar, women, as mistresses of their homes, did not have time to parse complicated, esoteric texts; rather, they needed English commentaries that explicated simple biblical truths. Aguilar answered her own call by publishing numerous tracts on Judaism in the style of Christian women’s mentor literature.

In her nonfiction prose, Aguilar “articulates the early-Victorian bourgeois ideology of gender which conferred exceptional moral power on the figure of the virtuous mother.”<sup>104</sup> *The Spirit of Judaism* recalls that, “so deep, so intense, exhaustless, is a mother’s love, that its figure is frequently used to demonstrate the love borne to us by our Father in heaven; His love alone exceeds it.”<sup>105</sup> Because their love is almost holy, Jewish mothers should play a central role in their children’s spiritual development—as their teachers. Aguilar acknowledges that parents generally play an integral part in their children’s religious education, pointing out that the Bible includes “directions for the conduct of parents towards children to be met with; one, preeminent, is the duty of imparting religious instruction [...] and this precept is contained in the very words of the Shema, ‘And thou shall teach them diligently unto thy children.’”<sup>106</sup> Likewise, the Talmud makes many pronouncements regarding religious instruction, most of which “include mothers equally with fathers in the education of their children.”<sup>107</sup> But according to Aguilar, education mostly falls to mothers. More so than fathers, mothers are tasked with “infusing that all-important but too often neglected branch of education, religion.”<sup>108</sup> In fact, “the ancient fathers [Talmudic rabbis] looked on ‘woman’s mission’ to be principally the education of her family.”<sup>109</sup> Therefore, Jewish mothers should be responsible for the religious education of Jewish youth.

Nineteenth-century women writers created ideal characters "whose image the reading audience was supposed to adopt," and Aguilar also "offered her ideal models of the domestic woman: the woman who cared for husband and home, and, above all, the mother who inculcated religion and morality into the hearts of her children."<sup>110</sup> So, *The Women of Israel* portrays Yocheved, the birth mother of Moses, as an ideal mother who gave her son a wide-ranging religious education. If not for his mother's instruction in religion, Moses might have ignored his calling as the most important Jewish leader in history:

The whole character of Moses displays a mother's guidance. A mother's love watching over childhood, and inculcating those high and glowing principles of virtue and patriotism, which the blessing of the Eternal ripened into such a beautiful maturity, as to render Moses a fit instrument in His hand to lead His chosen people from the land of bondage, and to reveal His changeless law.<sup>111</sup>

As Dianne Ashton notes, "it was while discussing Jochebed, Moses' mother, that Aguilar gave [the most] detailed advice about the spiritual significance of Jewish motherhood."<sup>112</sup> Like Yocheved, she believed, Jewish mothers should teach piety and righteousness to their children.

Aguilar's concept of mother-instructors reflects her overall beliefs about the place of affect in education. According to Victorian theories of womanhood, women, by nature, value love and emotion over rituals and institutions. Because Judaism is a loving religion, Jewish mothers are already equipped to "teach the religion of the heart unto [their] children, instead of merely inculcating peculiar forms, and desiring them to observe peculiar rites."<sup>113</sup> Only women, according to Aguilar, recognize that "adherence to instituted forms will not be sufficient of itself to make religion a vital principle, or open to the youthful heart its ever-springing fount of comfort and of love."<sup>114</sup> Aguilar admits that Jewish men might find her vision of Judaism to be excessively feminine, but she maintains that her educational program is the most likely of all to ensure children's lifelong commitment to Judaism. Children, she reasons, are more

influenced by emotion than by logic and hence are guided more by their mothers than their fathers. As they mature, boys will “bear [Judaism] with [them] as a shield of defence and robe of glory,” while girls will adopt their mothers’ “piety of the heart [which] will at once give strength for the trials of life, hallow domestic and social duty, purify their simplest pleasures.”<sup>115</sup> Girls will in turn become mothers, and the educational cycle will begin anew. Aguilar insists that Jewish education fails if it does not arouse emotions. As directed by loving mothers, a thorough religious education will counteract the diminished enthusiasm for Judaism that is often brought about by focusing on the mechanics of the religion alone.

Having their emotions aroused as children will eventually motivate Jewish adults to defend their religion when necessary. In this way, Aguilar believed Jewish mothers play a crucial role in stemming conversion to Christianity. *The Jewish Faith*, for example, centers on a young Jewish girl, Annie, seeking advice from her spiritual mother, Inez, about converting. Inez empathizes with Annie’s feelings of spiritual uncertainty, confiding,

As if to tempt me from my sole Rock of help and salvation, the belief of the Christian came to me, as it has come to you, and promised comfort and redemption, if I would but accept and believe in the sacrifice of Jesus. So strong was the temptation, that I often think the sin of apostasy must have been mine, had not the infinite mercy of my God so blessed a mother’s instructions, as to lead me to His word for my sole guidance and relief.<sup>116</sup>

At a critical moment in her spiritual development, Inez remembers lessons imparted by her loving mother, which “brought the Jewish faith to my heart and mind, and by guiding me to God’s word for instruction and comfort under every circumstance, had provided me with an invulnerable shield and support, which, though then unvalued, gave me all I required in my time of need,” enabling her to make friends with Christians.<sup>117</sup> According to Aguilar, Jewish girls must learn the particulars of their own faith before engaging with the Christian world.

Like Samson Raphael Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters on Judaism* (1836), *The Jewish Faith* is a series of fictional letters between a pious older Jew and a skeptical younger Jew. Aguilar claims to have utilized epistolary form because it is more personal and therefore more appealing to women, but beyond the genre of simple, didactic fiction, her letters actually grapple with issues of Jewish observance in the modern world. With no formal provisions for women's learning, and in the absence of Jewish vernacular texts, Jewish girls often "seek the works of Christian writers—and then we are astonished, if they are more Christian than Jewish in their thoughts."<sup>118</sup> *The Jewish Faith* recommends the production of new educational materials, in order "to elucidate for our female youth the tenets of their own [religion], and so remove all danger from the perusal of abler and better works by spiritual Christians."<sup>119</sup> Like Hirsch—the German rabbi who is widely considered to be the founder of Modern Orthodox Judaism—Aguilar preached cooperation with the Christian world but not at the expense of Jewish observance.

Those opposed to Jewish emancipation in Britain argued that Jews could never hope to assimilate, but Aguilar believed they could follow the customs of their Christian neighbors without sacrificing their Jewishness. In fact, "emancipationists carefully played up the Englishness of Anglo-Jewry to their Christian auditors while taking care to maintain traditional religious institutions among themselves," and "Aguilar herself warned readers against abandoning kosher laws and other distinctive rituals, even as she insisted that Jews and Christians shared identical spiritual goals."<sup>120</sup> Orthodox women like Aguilar "believed they adapted only the outer form of Judaism to [modernity] without changing traditional Jewish beliefs."<sup>121</sup> Though in *The Spirit of Judaism* Aguilar admonishes the Pharisees, in *The Women of Israel* she defends them as "the preservers of the religion and the law," stressing the importance of Jewish particularity, especially when it derives from law or ritual.<sup>122</sup>

Under the constraints of the Inquisition and especially after the Expulsion of the Jews, mother-instructors were essential to the preservation of Jewish practices.<sup>123</sup> According to Aguilar, such practices

included endogamy, that is, marriage to others of the same faith, and so *The Perez Family* highlights the causal relationship between ignorance and intermarriage. The character Reuben rationalizes his actions when surprising his family by becoming engaged to a Christian, arguing, “to believe in God is enough—all religions are the same before Him. [...] We are in no way commanded to marry among ourselves.”<sup>124</sup> His mother counters him, claiming, “We are so commanded, my dear son. In very many parts of our Holy Law we are positively forbidden to intermarry with the stranger; and, as a proof that so to wed was considered criminal, one of the first and most important points on which Ezra and Nehemiah insisted, was the putting away of strange wives,” and she concludes, “We ought to keep ourselves yet more distinct, now that we are mingled up among those who know God and serve Him, though not as we do.”<sup>125</sup> Without an adequate knowledge of Judaism’s laws, Reuben makes choices that will obscure Jewish singularity and threaten Jewish continuity.

Because mothers are “especially entrusted [with] the regeneration of Israel,” Reuben’s mother must teach her other children to remain faithful to their cultural heritage:

In them she saw the fruits of her efforts in their education, and she knew that they felt their brother’s wanderings from their beloved faith too sorrowfully ever to walk in his ways. They saw enough of their poor mother’s silent, uncomplaining grief, to suppose for a moment that her absence of all harshness toward Reuben proceeded from her approval of his marriage; and each and all lifted up the fervent cry for strength always to resist such fearful temptation, and to adhere to the faith of their fathers, even until death.<sup>126</sup>

The educational efforts of Jewish mothers continue even after their deaths. Inez tells Annie, “I am unspeakably thankful, that, even in death, your beloved mother had power to withhold you [...] that almost her last connected words were to conjure you never to desert your faith.”<sup>127</sup> Mothers, whether literal or spiritual, should lead Aguilar’s educational

movement. She saw women as an integral and active part of the Jewish world, and she charged them with maintaining Jewish continuity throughout the ages.

Aguilar's educational tracts showcase her distinctive position as a Jewish woman theologian. Because Judaism prioritized men's learning and scholarship and barred women from the traditional religious education provided for men and boys, women and girls were the most vulnerable to Christian proselytizing. Aguilar's books were an educational alternative for these Jews. She argued that children must be taught Judaism's prayers in vernacular languages so that they understand and respect the meaning of the words, partially as preparation to defend the Jewish faith against conversionists. Her push for comprehensive Jewish education beyond the rote learning of common Hebrew prayers and blessings responds not only to conversionist literature that uses the trappings of Judaism to promote the idea of the fulfillment of Judaism through Christianity, but also answers the popular notion in conversionist literature that Jewish women take no active role in Jewish intellectual life. She modeled her theory of education on Evangelical beliefs in the Bible as the foundation of religious knowledge that was, at the time, increasingly used by women to educate children in religion. Aguilar envisioned Jewish women as teachers of children and, consequently, as wellsprings of tradition.

## **Conclusion**

Aguilar saw education as the cornerstone of Anglo-Jewish identity. Strong Jewish education allows for Jews to retain their cultural heritage while also maintaining friendships with their Christian neighbors and being fully engaged members of British society. According to Aguilar, focusing on the biblical aspects of Judaism "will assist us in becoming firm and consistent followers of the faith we profess, and enable us to mingle amongst those of another creed, without fearing to imbibe it."<sup>128</sup> She envisioned a comprehensive education program as part of emancipation, stressing the need for an English translation of the Hebrew Bible, which she thought would help Jews to integrate into Christian society without being influenced

by Christianity. In her educational literature, she calls for a shift in the focus of orthodoxy, subordinating rituals to emotion and highlighting the feminine aspects of Judaism. By embracing Evangelical beliefs about womanhood, Aguilar created educational roles for Jewish women, giving them not only a new position within the Jewish world but also the cherished responsibility for the continuity of Jewish education and Jewish life from generation to generation.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Fay, "Grace Aguilar: Rewriting Scott Rewriting History," in *British Romanticism and the Jews: History, Culture, Literature*, ed. Sheila A. Spector (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 216.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Galchinsky, ed., *Grace Aguilar: Selected Writings*, by Grace Aguilar (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2003), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Langton, "The Gracious Ambiguity of Grace Aguilar (1816-47): Anglo-Jewish Theologian, Novelist, Poet, and Pioneer of Interfaith Relations," *Melilah* 8 (2011), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, "'Not the Superiority of Belief, But Superiority of True Devotion': Grace Aguilar's Histories of the Spirit," in *Silent Voices: Forgotten Novels by Victorian Women Writers*, ed. Brenda Ayres (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> Grace Aguilar, *The Jewish Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1864), 36.

<sup>7</sup> Debbie Weissman, "An Historical Case Study in Jewish Women's Education: Chana Shpitzer and Ma'aleh," *Nashim* 29 (2015), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 162-63.

<sup>9</sup> Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714-1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 25, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Alan H. Singer, "Great Britain or Judea Nova? National Identity, Property, and the Jewish Naturalization Controversy of 1753," in *British Romanticism and the Jews: History, Culture, Literature*, ed. Sheila A. Spector (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 20.

<sup>11</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 45.

<sup>12</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 86.

<sup>13</sup> Linda Gertner Zatlín, *The Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Jewish Novel* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Galchinsky, *Grace Aguilar*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Valman, "From Domestic Paragon to Rebellious Daughter: Victorian Jewish Women Novelists," in *Jewish Women Writers in Britain*, ed. Nadia Valman (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2014), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer: Romance and Reform in Victorian England* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 39.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion: "The Jewish Question" and English National Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Israel Finestein, "Anglo-Jewish Opinion during the Struggle for Emancipation, 1828-58," in *Jewish Society in Victorian England: Collected Essays*, ed. Israel Finestein (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1993), 8.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 22 (London: R. Bagshaw, 1830), 798.

<sup>21</sup> Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), defines "radical assimilation" as when, historically, "a minority of Jews [...] ceased to identify themselves as Jews and cut their ties to Judaism and the Jewish community" (5-6).

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Macaulay, "Civil Disabilities of the Jews (1831)," in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed., ed. Paul

Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 146.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> William Hazlitt, "Emancipation of the Jews," in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, Vol. 19, ed. P.P. Howe (London: Dent, 1933), 321.

<sup>27</sup> Steven Singer, "Jewish Education in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: A Study of the Early Victorian London Community," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 77, Nos. 2-3 (1986), 174.

<sup>28</sup> Bryan Cheyette, "From Apology to Revolt: Benjamin Farjeon, Amy Levy and the Post-Emancipation Anglo-Jewish Novel, 1880-1900," *Jewish Historical Studies* 29 (1982), 255.

<sup>29</sup> Cheyette, "The Other Self: Anglo-Jewish Fiction and the Representation of Jews in England, 1875-1905," in *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*, ed. David Cesarani (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 98.

<sup>30</sup> Hazlitt, "Emancipation of the Jews," 322.

<sup>31</sup> Aguilar, "History of the Jews in England," in *Essays and Miscellanies* (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1853), 272.

<sup>32</sup> Aguilar, *The Spirit of Judaism*, ed. Isaac Leeser (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1842), 57.

<sup>33</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*, 86.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.

<sup>35</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*, 85; Singer, "Jewish Education," 164-65.

<sup>36</sup> Singer, "Jewish Education," 172.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>38</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*, 97.

<sup>39</sup> Geoffrey Cantor, *Quakers, Jews, and Science: Religious Responses to Modernity and the Sciences in Britain, 1650-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 62.

<sup>40</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*, 97.

Lindsay Katzir, "Learning by Heart: Grace Aguilar's Ideal Jewish Education"

<sup>41</sup> Singer, "Jewish Education," 167.

<sup>42</sup> David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 16.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Singer, "Jewish Education," 166.

<sup>45</sup> Michal Shahaf, "Charlotte Montefiore's Secret: The Cheap Jewish Library—An Educational Philanthropic Mission," *Nashim* 30 (2016), 52.

<sup>46</sup> Singer, "Jewish Education," 167-68.

<sup>47</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, 101-2, emphasis original.

<sup>48</sup> Aguilar, *Jewish Faith*, 12. In 1831, David Aaron de Sola, senior minister and cantor of London's Bevis Marks synagogue, began delivering sermons in English.

<sup>49</sup> Isaac Leeser was a Jewish-American rabbi, author, translator, editor, and founder of the Jewish periodical *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*. See Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz*, 150-51, and Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, 102.

<sup>50</sup> Shahaf, "Charlotte Montefiore's Secret," 50, 60.

<sup>51</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, 101.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. The Shema is recited twice, sometimes three times, daily by observant Jews. The first verse, Deuteronomy 6:4, affirms monotheism. The term "Shema" is used to indicate a longer part of the daily prayers, which includes Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and Numbers 15:37-41.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>56</sup> Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 132.

<sup>57</sup> The Talmud is the central text of rabbinic Judaism that codifies Jewish law. The rabbis contributed to the oral law and its commentary, which was eventually codified in the Talmud.

<sup>58</sup> Lindsay Katzir, "Grace Aguilar's Kol Isha: Authoring New Roles for Women in Judaism," *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2019), 362-85.

<sup>59</sup> "Jewish Women," *Israel's Watchman; A Hebrew Christian*

*Magazine* (March 1877), 42.

<sup>60</sup> Valman, *The Jewess*, 94.

<sup>61</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, 100.

<sup>62</sup> Langton, "Gracious Ambiguity," 12-13.

<sup>63</sup> David Woolf Marks, "On Outward and Inward Worship," *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions, at the West London Synagogue of British Jews* (London: Groombridge, 1851), 172. The West London Synagogue of British Jews was consecrated in 1842, the same year *The Spirit of Judaism* appeared.

<sup>64</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, 228.

<sup>65</sup> Langton, "Gracious Ambiguity," 26.

<sup>66</sup> Burstein, "Not the Superiority of Belief," 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>68</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, 19-20.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Aguilar, *Jewish Faith*, 33.

<sup>71</sup> Aguilar, *Women of Israel*, 1:125.

<sup>72</sup> Aguilar, "The Perez Family," in *Home Scenes and Heart Studies* (New York: D. Appleton, 1901), 33.

<sup>73</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, 173.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>78</sup> Aguilar, *Perez Family*, 32

<sup>79</sup> Aguilar, *Jewish Faith*, 31.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-36.

<sup>81</sup> Langton, "Gracious Ambiguity," 6.

<sup>82</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, 214-15.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>84</sup> Aguilar, *Jewish Faith*, 38.

<sup>85</sup> Cynthia Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2002), 40.

<sup>86</sup> Renée Levine Melammed, "Crypto-Jewish Women Facing the Spanish Inquisition: Transmitting Religious Practices, Beliefs, and Attitudes," in *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Social Change*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson and Edward D. English (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 198.

<sup>87</sup> Jacob Lackner, "Violent Men and Malleable Women: Gender and Jewish Conversion to Christianity in Medieval Sermon Exempla," *Nashim*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2016), 36-37.

<sup>88</sup> Renee Levine Melammed, "Sephardi Women in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith R. Baskin, 2nd Edition (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 139.

<sup>89</sup> Melammed, "Crypto-Jewish," 198-200.

<sup>90</sup> Joan N. Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980), 40.

<sup>91</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*, 96-97.

<sup>92</sup> Burstyn, *Victorian Education*, 36-38.

<sup>93</sup> Shahaf, "Charlotte Montefiore's Secret," 50.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>95</sup> Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz*, 164.

<sup>96</sup> Burstyn, *Victorian Education*, 99.

<sup>97</sup> Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz*, 129.

<sup>98</sup> Shahaf, "Charlotte Montefiore's Secret," 56.

<sup>99</sup> Galchinsky, *Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman*, 31.

<sup>100</sup> Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 225.

<sup>101</sup> In 1838 Rebecca Gratz, an American Jewish writer and philanthropist, founded the Hebrew Sunday School, and her curriculum prioritized the attainment of religious knowledge. See Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz*, 121.

<sup>102</sup> Shahaf, "Charlotte Montefiore's Secret," 49.

- <sup>103</sup> Aguilar, *Jewish Faith*, 14.
- <sup>104</sup> Valman, "From Domestic Paragon," 11.
- <sup>105</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, 133.
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.
- <sup>107</sup> Aguilar, *Women of Israel*, 2:373.
- <sup>108</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, x.
- <sup>109</sup> Aguilar, *Women of Israel*, 2:424-25.
- <sup>110</sup> Shahaf, "Charlotte Montefiore's Secret," 56; Galchinsky, *Grace Aguilar*, 21.
- <sup>111</sup> Aguilar, *Women of Israel*, 1:196.
- <sup>112</sup> Dianne Ashton, "Grace Aguilar and the Matriarchal Theme in Jewish Women's Spirituality," in *Active Voices: Women in Jewish Culture*, ed. Maurie Sacks (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 85.
- <sup>113</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, 156.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.
- <sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, x.
- <sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, *Jewish Faith*, 271.
- <sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>120</sup> Burstein, "Not the Superiority of Belief," 2-3.
- <sup>121</sup> Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz*, 161.
- <sup>122</sup> Aguilar, *Women of Israel*, 2:195.
- <sup>123</sup> Melammed, "Crypto-Jewish," 205.
- <sup>124</sup> Aguilar, *Perez Family*, 38.
- <sup>125</sup> Aguilar, 39.
- <sup>126</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, x, 43.
- <sup>127</sup> Aguilar, *Jewish Faith*, 40, 42-43.
- <sup>128</sup> Aguilar, *Spirit of Judaism*, 50.

