


Please cite the Published Version

Crome, Andrew  (2021) Seductive Splendour and Caricatured Simplicity. Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 97 (1). pp. 111-128. ISSN 2054-9318

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7227/bjrl.97.1.8>

Publisher: Manchester University Press

Version: Accepted Version

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Seductive Splendour and Caricatured Simplicity: Catholicism and Nonconformity in Nineteenth-Century 'Jewish Conversion' Novels¹

Abstract: This article examines English evangelical novels focused on the conversion of Jewish characters, published from the 1820s-1850s. It concentrates particularly on the way in which these novels emphasised the importance of the Church of England in constructing national and religious identity, and used Jewish conversion as a way to critique Catholicism and Nonconformity. Jewish worship, rabbinic authority, and Talmudic devotion were linked to Roman Catholic attitudes towards priesthood and tradition, while Jews were also portrayed as victims of a persecuting Roman Church. Nonconformity was criticised for disordered worship and confusing Jews with its attacks on respectable Anglicanism. As a national religion, novelists therefore imagined that Jews would be saved by a national church, and often linked this to concepts of a national restoration to Palestine. This article, therefore, develops and complicates understandings of evangelical views of Jews in the nineteenth century, and their links to 'writing the nation' in popular literature.

Keywords: Jews, Jewish conversion, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, Catholicism, Nonconformity, Evangelicalism

At an early point in Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's *Judah's Lion*, the impetuous Alick Cohen refuses to kneel before the host during a Maltese Corpus Christi procession. An altercation follows, which draws praises from a local rabbi and a Protestant missionary. While each admire Alick for his zeal against idolatry, the incident leads to a disagreement. As the missionary tells the rabbi: 'you with your Talmud are as far astray from the law of Moses as the poor Papist with his wafer-god is from the gospel of Christ.'²

This comparison was not unusual. Historians have noted that Protestant polemic against Judaism often paralleled devotion to the Talmud and rabbis with Catholic devotion to the priesthood and tradition.³ These connections helped Protestant writers put an ‘alien’ faith in terms readers might understand, and take advantage of knowledge of anti-Catholic discourse to score polemical points. Yet critiques of Judaism did not simply repeat attacks on Catholicism. Their criticism combined hope for Jewish conversion to Protestantism with ‘pure’ biblical faith. Biblical commentaries, prophetic exegesis, polemic, and missionary periodicals all contained conversion narratives to encourage British Protestants. A number of evangelical writers also produced novels dealing with Jewish conversion from the 1820s-1850s. These presented conversion as a rejection of tradition and repudiation of Catholic idolatry that demonstrated Protestant superiority. However, these conversions were denominationally specific. They repeatedly affirmed the superiority of the Church of England, and in projecting a future Jewish homeland and national church in Palestine, the importance of ecclesiastical establishment. The narratives sidelined Nonconformists alongside Catholics, with Dissent often referred to obliquely as a deterrent to Jewish conversion. This article examines these tropes, suggesting ways that authors used Jewish characters to explore concerns within British evangelicalism, projecting an image of a unified, national Church as the carrier of Christianity. It therefore builds on existing work on the way Protestants linked Judaism with Catholicism, extending it by arguing explicitly for the importance of denominational identity in the novels. Conversion novels show ways in which popular evangelical literature sought not simply to write the nation, but to contribute to a distinctive Anglican identity that brought the Church of England into alliance with converted Israel.

Jewish Conversion Novels

Active interest in Jewish conversion developed in England during the early nineteenth century. Its best-known manifestation, the foundation of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews in 1809, was part of the proliferation of missionary movements in the first decades of the 1800s. Better known as the ‘London Jews’ Society’ (hereafter LJS), it was originally founded on a non-denominational basis. Arguments about the consecration of the Society’s chapel, combined with the necessity of a bailout by wealthy lawyer Lewis Way, led to its reconstitution along Anglican lines in 1815. The LJS succeeded in gaining large subscriptions and funded missionary work in Britain, Europe, and Asia by the mid-century. Its effectiveness in terms of conversions remained small, particularly at home, where it was often criticised by Jews for its aims and methods.⁴ Continued interest in Jews was further fuelled by the growing popularity of millennialism amongst evangelicals.⁵

Alongside proofs that Jesus was the prophesied messiah and model prayers for potential converts, the Society’s publications often included conversion narratives.⁶ Whether from the Society’s missionaries, excerpted from eighteenth-century English texts, or reprinted from contemporary European sources, they were a common feature of its periodical publications. Readers of the June 1816 edition of *The Jewish Expositor and Friend of Israel* were treated to a Polish rabbi’s conversion narrative, followed by descriptions of oral testimony from London converts.⁷ Most of these conversions were drawn-out processes marked by doubt, fear of persecution, and a slow dawning of salvation.⁸ While some of the accounts featured an initial conversion to Catholicism followed by a later shift to Protestant belief,⁹ others emphasised an open repudiation of Rome. Many missionaries were convinced that the Roman Church’s ‘idolatry’ was the key impediment to Jewish conversion,¹⁰ and that Rome’s historic persecution of Jews turned them against Christ.¹¹ Protestantism was the logical corrective to this, with its focus on the scriptures and condemnation of images in worship. Yet it was specifically Anglicanism, with its liturgy and structure that the LJS

believed was the most attractive form of faith to Jews. As the introduction to a collection of LJS hymns noted, ‘in the ritual and worship of our venerable church, there is so much which seems peculiarly adapted to promote the edification of the descendants of Abraham, that we might almost be induced to suppose that the founders had even anticipated their accession to it.’¹² This implied that Nonconformist worship was alien to Jews, if not worse. When the missionary Joseph Wolff defended himself from Catholic attacks in 1828, he denied that he was a Methodist: ‘I dislike the Church discipline of the Wesleyan Methodists more than I do that of the Church of Rome.’¹³

Conversion to Anglicanism therefore allowed Jews to associate themselves with the English establishment. This tied Jewish conversion into debates on national identity in the period.¹⁴ Works about conversion appeared against a background of disputes regarding Church establishment and the political nation: from the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and Catholic emancipation, to the furore surrounding the Tractarian movement and Nonconformist campaigns against tithes and Church rates. Hovering over all of this from the 1830s onwards was the question of Jewish emancipation – when might Jews be permitted to enter Parliament?¹⁵ Conversionist works were therefore about more than just Jewish conversion. They also served to comment upon a range of issues of interest to English Christians.

Alongside memoirs, tracts, and handbooks, conversionists published a number of novels discussing Jewish conversion. While evangelicals had initially been suspicious of fiction as a means of communicating gospel truth, this faded in the 1830s and 1840s as authors displayed a willingness to adopt the style of a *roman à thèse*.¹⁶ Consequently, these novels were explicit about their didactic and improving purpose.¹⁷ The conversion novel, which Rachel Howard places in a wider genre of ‘moral-domestic fiction’, could focus on nominal Protestants, Catholics, missionary converts, or Jews.¹⁸ Jewish conversion novels

appeared throughout the early nineteenth century, many directly citing the LJS's activities as their inspiration.¹⁹ Early examples included Charlotte Anley's *Miriam* (1826), about the conversion of a rich Jewish girl in Westmoreland, and Revd Charles William Chalken's anonymously published *The Hebrew* (1828).²⁰ Amelia Bristow, a convert from Judaism herself,²¹ published a trilogy of novels: *Sophia de Lissau* (1826), *Emma de Lissau* (1828) and *The Orphans of Lissau* (1830). These dealt with the conversions of Polish Jewish emigres in the eighteenth century. Some authors produced numerous works. Osborn W. Trenery Heighway published 'genuine' conversion narratives including *Leila Ada*, *The Jewish Convert* (1852), its sequel *Children of Abraham, or Sketches of Jewish Converts* (1857), and *Adeline: Or, Mysteries, Romance, and Realities of Jewish Life* (1854). The two most influential conversion novels were written by important evangelical writers. Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna has attracted increasing critical attention in recent years for her work as editor of the *Christian Lady's Magazine* and her social reform fiction.²² *Judah's Lion*, first published serially in 1841,²³ told the story of urbane young Jew Alick Cohen's conversion to a form of Jewish Anglicanism during a journey to Palestine. Annie Webb first published *Naomi, Or the Last Days of Jerusalem* in 1840. The book spun its conversion narrative around Josephus's descriptions of Jerusalem's destruction, and was immediately popular. By 1860, it had gone through seventeen editions, and remained in print until 1899.²⁴ Its popularity led Webb to write other novels on Jewish history (e.g. *Benaiah* [1865]) and contemporary Jewish conversion (e.g. *Julamark* [1849]).

Didacticism in the novels sometimes suggested their authors' discomfort at writing fiction. Plots often acted as a way to set up discussions, allowing Christians to correct Jewish errors. Sometimes, as in *Miriam*, the potential convert debated with Christian ministers to remove their doubts, allowing the cleric to share large portions of evangelical theology.²⁵ In other instances, such as *Emma de Lissau*, set piece disputations took place between the

eponymous convert and rabbis.²⁶ In extreme cases, this led to the near total absence of plot in favour of dialogue disputation.²⁷

Some novels claimed, falsely, to be genuine conversion stories. Bristow's *Sophia de Lissau* stated that it was an 'authentic' narrative, written 'to convey an outline of the domestic and religious habits of the Jews'.²⁸ Heighway protested that he had 'nowhere written one word, look, or expression which is not most exact truth' in *Leila Ada*²⁹ (although he was later sued by his publishers for inventing fictional converts).³⁰ Another technique was to incorporate historical figures into the novel. Webb's *Julamerk* wove in genuine stories of suffering and persecution in her attempt to promote Christian charity towards the Nestorians, whom she believed to be descended from the lost tribes of Israel. This theory was propagated by American missionary Asahel Grant, who also appeared as a character in the novel.³¹ Footnotes directed readers to sources detailing the persecutions. More imaginatively, the novels often blended with historical fiction. Bristow's *Emma de Lissau*, for example, had her characters meet a dull Tom Paine in revolutionary France.

The novels often drew from popular secular genres. *Naomi* was an example of romantic historical fiction, weaving its conversion story around both Josephus's account of the city's fall and its heroine's love life. *Leila Ada* was part conversion narrative, part European travelogue, while *Adeline* dabbled in broad comedy, with questionable success.³² Several novels used tropes from popular Gothic or adventure fiction, including the kidnapping and confinement of young women, shadowy conspiracies, and battle scenes. Tonna disavowed fiction after the adventurous elements of *Judah's Lion* excited her to such an extent that they took on a life of their own.³³

Catholic Comparisons

As Nadia Valman noted, conversion novels were permeated with ‘virulent anti-Catholicism’.³⁴ This was often direct. *Julamerk*, for example, paralleled Nestorian Christian hero Isaac with the attempt of the Roman Church to undermine his faith. His ‘cheerful and earnest piety’ compared positively to the ‘dull and spiritless’ devotion of the monks.³⁵ Alick’s reaction to Catholicism in *Judah’s Lion*, even before his conversion, was to view it as ‘a system that falsely usurps the name of Christianity’.³⁶ In Bristow’s work, it was a faith associated with ‘seductive splendour . . . well adapted to the mind of man in his natural state’.³⁷

Catholicism was inherently threatening to Jews, both in terms of its ‘idoltrous’ worship, and due to the persecutions it had orchestrated. Jewish characters commonly condemned these elements of the faith. Authors compared Jews positively to Catholics when discussing their rejection of idolatry.³⁸ At the start of novels, Jewish characters often wrongly equated Protestant worship with Catholic superstition. In *Julamerk*, the future convert Zoraide’s family rejected Christianity due to its ‘ignorance and superstition’ after witnessing Catholic worship. Isaac, the novel’s Christian hero, corrected Zoraide: ‘Those who belong to the Greek and Romish churches are, undoubtedly, holding a sadly corrupted faith . . . But, believe me, the fault is not in our blessed religion as it was taught by the Redeemer and his apostles.’³⁹ In *Adeline*, the Jewish heroine and her lover visited St Paul’s Cathedral, comparing it to ‘our own glorious temple’. They bemoaned the way in which Catholics corrupted such buildings: ‘in front of that altar they place a semicircle of burning lamps, or else great wax candles . . . These throw a pale, unsteady light upon an image of the cross and a man upon it. Just fancy it here, and away goes the poetry.’⁴⁰ Anglicanism was marked not just by pure worship, but also by good taste.

Catholic history of persecuting Jews was another common theme. Rabbi Selig in *Emma de Lissau* discussed Christianity with Emma, revealing that his distrust of Christians

came from ‘hardships endured by the Jews on the continent, particularly in Roman Catholic districts’.⁴¹ Anticipating the 1858-59 Mortara affair, Selig’s infant siblings were secretly baptised by Catholics: ‘as they were now received into the bosom of the church, their Jewish relatives had no longer any claim on them!’⁴² Later, Emma travelled to Rome, where she saw first-hand the effect of Catholic persecution. Bristow established a contrast along both national and religious lines:

But never had she, a native of happy England, that favoured land of gospel light and generous toleration, imagined even in her gloomiest moments, a state of mental debasement and servile misery, so completely revolting, as that now presented to her view in the Ghetto of Rome.⁴³

In *Adeline*, the benevolent Mr Cohen was moved by tales of Jewish suffering in Poland: ‘The Roman Catholics are foremost in the persecution . . . infatuated people, headed by their priests’.⁴⁴ The Jewish patriot Da Costa in *Judah’s Lion* recalled being attacked by monks who ‘not only avowed but gloried in the persecutions and massacres of their church’.⁴⁵

Many of the more ghastly examples of persecution drew from both anti-Catholic polemic and tropes of Gothic fiction, a genre that often invoked the anti-Semitic persecution of the Spanish Inquisition.⁴⁶ Jesuits were particular targets.⁴⁷ In *Adeline*, after converting the young Jew Eva St. Maur, Jesuit Father Barrett planned to steal her away to marry her, before claiming her fortune and becoming the *cicisbeo* of a Tuscan countess.⁴⁸ In *Judah’s Lion*, Da Costa and Alick searched for a young Jew kidnapped by monks and hidden in a monastery dungeon.⁴⁹ *Julamerk*’s Jesuit Geronimo was a figure described in explicitly Gothic terms, working from his ‘gloomy and solitary cell’ to enact his ‘deep-laid scheme . . . or revenge for its failure.’⁵⁰

The novels also set up structural parallels between Judaism and Catholicism. Despite their differences, there were a number of reasons to link them. Superficially, both were

‘foreign’ faiths opposed to Anglicanism (and, thus, Englishness). Discussions of civil disabilities and the extension of political rights in the state also often brought up discussion of Judaism together with Catholicism.⁵¹ David Feldman has noted that comparisons between Jewish and Catholic beliefs were rhetorically powerful, and (Protestants hoped) would help drive internal Jewish reform and eventual conversion.⁵² For example, the most influential critique of Judaism, Hebraist and LJS missionary Alexander McCaul’s *Old Paths* (1837), made clear a distinction between the mass of Jews (who were praised), and rabbis (who were linked to despotism and Catholicism).⁵³ Notions of Catholic conspiracies, persecutions, and plotters, might also suggest links to Judaism. As Carol Margaret Davison has argued, plots centred on secret societies often raised fears of a vast Jewish conspiracy tied to the Illuminati, Freemasons, and others ‘behind’ the French Revolution.⁵⁴

The most popular way of making this connection was by comparing Jewish devotion to the Talmud and rabbis to the Catholic emphasis upon tradition and the priesthood.⁵⁵ As Joseph Wolff lamented, ‘as the Church of Judea began to neglect the commandments of God . . . in like manner, the Church of Rome neglected and perverted the pure word of the Gospel, and substituted for it cunningly devised fables . . . and just as the Rabbis of old attributed to themselves *infallibility*, so the doctors of the Church of Rome do the same.’⁵⁶

Conversion awakened Jews to these resemblances. At times, converts directly confronted priests about them. In *Emma de Lissau* the eponymous heroine told Father Dermot ‘that she thought there was a great affinity between Judaism and the Romish religion, in many respects. Nor did she fail, among other allusions, to compare the Jewish presiding Rabbi, in some measure, with the sovereign Pontiff at Rome.’⁵⁷ In *Judah’s Lion*, Alick’s aversion to ‘the idolatrous errors of Popery’ prepared him to renounce his Judaism. As he demolished Catholic arguments with scripture, the missionary Mrs Ryan ‘took occasion by this to show him how similarly unfounded and unscriptural were the doctrines and traditions

of the Talmudists.’⁵⁸ When, in the same novel, the rabbi Ben-Melchor accused Mr Ryan of promoting idolatry, he responded with fury: ‘You perfectly know that the religion of these people [Catholics] is not my religion, but that it much more resembles your’s [*sic*].’⁵⁹

Heighway made the charge that, like Catholics, Jews ‘have introduced an enormous rival to divine revelation’ in the oral law.⁶⁰ Failure to perceive these similarities could be disastrous. Raphael, the hero of *Orphans of Lissau*, chose to consult Catholic monks rather than flee to Amsterdam or London on his conversion: ‘He knew not how little the Roman priests differ from the Jewish Rabbis . . . the dogmas of both rest upon legends and traditions, and neither of them take the written word in its purity, as the guide of their ceremonies.’⁶¹

Similarities could also be more subtle. In *Naomi*, Webb engaged in a description of Temple worship that directly recalled Catholicism. The service was marked by ‘imposing magnificence, the glittering fold and jewelled dresses of the priests . . . clouds of incense . . . splendid altars . . . ordained to impress the senses’. In comparison, the early Christians made ‘no prostrations . . . no outward gestures or vehement excitement’ and worshipped in a building marked by its ‘simplicity’.⁶²

Structural comparisons between the faiths also appeared. The *Lissau* novels drew clear thematic parallels between Judaism and Catholicism. When the matriarch Anna discussed Sophia's education with Rabbi Colmar, she refused to allow her daughter a Bible. Although ‘divinely inspired’, she told Sophia, ‘it is more particularly from the Oral Law you are to deduce your daily practice;—indeed, without the Oral Law to explain many points, the Bible would be almost useless.’⁶³ This parallels a discussion in *Emma de Lissau* in which the heroine's fellow convert Catherine Levy turned from her evangelical faith towards Catholicism: ‘Holy Mother Church allows not her children to use their own weak judgment, on a volume so mysterious, so difficult to understand . . . Pray how *can we* pretend to decide on the real meaning of every dark passage we meet with in it?’⁶⁴

The temptation of Catholicism was always a danger in Bristow's eyes. Supposed Catholic hatred of Jews, therefore, combined with an awareness of the Church's attractions. This came across most clearly in *Emma de Lissau*, where Emma encountered her Catholic double, Victorine Ansel. The daughter of a rabbi, Victorine was preparing for a life as a nun, and travelled to Rome with Emma and her father. On the journey, the two women acknowledged the genuine nature of the other's faith, and shared reflections on the number of superficial believers in both of their traditions. Subsequently, Emma was aided by Madame Dupont, who gave her a locket 'blessed by the Pope' to protect her on the voyage to England. Although she viewed the gift as the 'bigotry of the kind-hearted giver', when subsequently saved from shipwreck she remembered the 'assertions respecting its talismanic virtues'.⁶⁵ While these elements of the Roman faith attracted Emma, Bristow reminded readers of the realities that lurked behind them. Victorine's faith was 'quiet' as opposed to Emma's public testimony; her future in the convent described in Gothic terms as 'desolate . . . a living tomb'. Their journey to Rome ended in Emma seeing the horrors of the Ghetto first hand. On her return to England, Emma passed on Dupont's locket to a young Catholic girl. While for the Jewish convert the locket returned to being a 'curious work of art', for the Catholic 'it was an inestimable relic'.⁶⁶ Protestant rationality ultimately wins out over idolatry and superstition. Whereas Jews relied on the Talmud, converts relied exclusively on scripture.⁶⁷ Asher Mordecai, the hero of *The Hebrew*, converted after stealing a New Testament and reading it in romantic mountain solitude.⁶⁸ When Miriam debated the Anglican minister Mr Howard, she brought the Talmud as her 'talisman . . . [it] seemed to defy, if size and beauty of covering could do so, every attack against its boasted truth'. Howard, who used only a pocket Bible, nonetheless prevailed.⁶⁹ In *Leila Ada*, rabbis questioned the heroine surrounded by the Talmud, commentaries, and Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*; yet 'Leila had only the Bible'.⁷⁰ Burstein is right to highlight that this proliferation of texts is an attempt by Jewish

characters to ‘conceal from themselves their essential lack of significance’.⁷¹ More than this, it provides a coded critique of both Catholicism and liberal theological trends in Protestantism. The true believer relied on scripture, not on commentaries, academics, or priests.

Interrogation scenes, such as in *Leila Ada*, recalled images of Catholic inquisitional practices. Although Jews were victims of Catholic persecution, the novels emphasised the similarities between persecuting rabbis and over-bearing priests. As Bristow noted of Raphael in *Orphans*:

the Synagogue that he had quitted, and the Church he was now a member of, were but too closely assimilated in their discipline and customs. Equally intolerant and bigoted, excommunicating and anathematising all who differed from them,—equally exclusive in their creed,—equally rigorous in their dealings with apostates,—equally devoted to an endless round of carnal ceremonies, the invention of man . . .⁷²

Again bearing similarities to Jesuits in Gothic literature, rabbis in the novels were involved in nefarious schemes to de-convert those who turned to Christianity.⁷³ Jewish heroines saw spaces they presumed as homes or sanctuaries converted into prisons. Emma de Lissau was kidnapped, imprisoned and hidden away by her mother.⁷⁴ Leila Ada was sent to her zealous uncle’s house, and subjected to violent questioning and cursing by rabbis.⁷⁵ On her conversion, Naomi was locked in her room while her father called down curses on her. The Talmud, like Catholic jurists, justified violence against both Jewish converts and all gentiles alike in the eyes of many novelists. Several drew on the historic charge that the Talmud supposedly called for the death of gentiles.⁷⁶ While Christian missionaries in Tonna’s work acknowledged that no Jew actually sought to kill gentiles, they instead used the charge to show that Jews were therefore disobedient to the Talmud itself.⁷⁷

These links between Judaism and Catholicism reveal the ambiguous nature of Protestant views towards Jews in the nineteenth century. The Jews were potentially threatening in their foreignness and shared attributes with Catholicism. At the same time, they served both to justify Protestant belief, and to provide further rhetorical ammunition against Catholicism.

Nonconformity and the Church in Conversion Novels

All Protestant denominations could be fertile ground for interest in both Jewish conversion and anti-Catholicism. Despite this, while Nonconformists were willing participants in the battle against popery, they were often fighting the Church of England over issues such as Church rates, tithes, and burials. Establishment remained a continual bugbear, and in one sense made Nonconformists a natural ally with Catholics when they campaigned against civil disabilities. These issues often limited Protestant cooperation, even when sharing broad theological agreement. The LJS's false start as a non-denominational group illustrates the sort of problems that could derail joint Anglican and Nonconformist missionary work.⁷⁸ As John Wolffe and D. G. Paz have both shown, popular anti-Catholicism often fractured over issues of establishment and Church-State relations. While the pan-Protestant meeting to discuss a unified response against Sir Robert Peel's 1845 Maynooth grant attracted over 1,000 delegates from across the country and the denominational spectrum, a number of Dissenters seceded when it refused to discuss establishment.⁷⁹ Likewise, responses to the 1850 'Papal Aggression' that began as displays of Protestant unity often ended in squabbling and splits.⁸⁰

Elisabeth Jay noted that the majority of evangelical novels were written by middle class Anglicans.⁸¹ The same holds true for the conversion novels. It is therefore unsurprising that the novels were solidly Anglican in their ecclesiology. The Christians that Jews encountered in them were invariably associated with the established Church. When

Nonconformity appeared, it was usually as a passing critique from non-Christian characters, drawing attention to the excesses of behaviour that were not acceptable within the theologically sound and respectable world of Anglicanism. Uncomfortable hints in the novels also suggested that the practice of Nonconformity contributed to Jewish reluctance to convert. For example, Tonna discussed the barriers that denominational confusion presented to conversion. Although complaining about the idolatry he found among Christians in the Holy Land, the Jewish patriot Da Costa also cited disagreement among Protestants as a reason for rejecting Christianity: ‘You know what a jumble there is in London: Churchmen, Presbyterians, Baptists, and some fifty more who agree in nothing but eschewing image-worship and deifying the Nazarene.’⁸²

The novels highlighted the advantages of specifically Anglican Christianity, particularly social benefits. Alick’s father, who harboured ambitions for his son in English society, was alarmed by the warnings of the ship’s schoolmaster that Alick was being seduced into Methodism: ‘not merely from the religion of his fathers, but to join a sect so extremely bigoted, narrow-minded, and despised by all sensible people, as to become a scoff among respectable Christians.’⁸³ An association with evangelicalism, in whatever form, was socially unacceptable for Mr Cohen. A similar social fear haunted characters in *Miriam*. Although Anley was possibly a Quaker herself, the novel found no place for Nonconformity in its idyllic Westmoreland setting.⁸⁴ The parish minister Mr Howard was a dedicated and kind evangelical, and the Anglican church at the centre of village life. Whereas the Stuart family, who first attract Miriam to Christianity, were Presbyterian, their Scottish heritage ensured connection to an established Church. The widowed Helen Stuart was a wife of the manse, while her oldest son entered the kirk as a minister. Characters were keen to disavow any connection to the perceived excesses of Nonconformity. Miriam’s father feared that Mrs Stuart was ‘one of those always singing psalms, and talking of her own cursed creed’, but

was reassured by his gardener that she was respectable.⁸⁵ When the wayward Edith Stuart repented after an affair, she expressed the strength of her regret by invoking Nonconformity: ‘what would I not give to be the very being I have so often spurned and derided—a child of God—a *methodist* [*sic*], any thing to be but safe within the fold of heaven.’⁸⁶ *Leila Ada* therefore emphasised the blessing converts found in the Book of Common Prayer. After Leila’s death the Anglican funeral service, rather than scripture, was the impetus for her father’s conversion: ‘It made him weep—he prayed—and a ray of divine comfort illuminated his soul.’⁸⁷

While characters in *Adeline* praised the beauty and propriety of St. Paul’s in comparison to the extravagance of Catholicism, Heighway simultaneously condemned the austerity of Nonconformity. Describing Mr Cohen’s private synagogue, the author applauded the tasteful decoration and aesthetic:

Beautiful exceedingly are these little temples. For ourselves—we can never think of them save with feelings of deep delight. That caricatured simplicity—that palpable, undisguised meanness—which so frequently characterise the house of God amongst Christians, and especially dissenting congregations—as if, although nothing is too good or too beautiful for their own house, anything is good enough for His—this, we say, is not known here. Elegance, grandeur, harmony, and chasteness, mingling in a thousand forms of perfect loveliness, mark the disposition within them.⁸⁸

In the same way that Isaac earlier criticised Catholic decoration for removing the poetry from devotion through over-elaboration of the worship space, so Nonconformity did the same through a false humility. Simplicity was a cover for stinginess.

It is important to consider why the novelists highlighted the Anglican nature of the conversions of their Jewish characters. As Howard has suggested, conversion novels were preoccupied with writing the nation and establishing the boundaries of acceptable belonging

within it. They therefore constructed stable others in Jews and Catholics against whom to define national identity.⁸⁹ While this is borne out to some extent, the position nonetheless needs nuancing with reference beyond a generalised Protestant identity towards a specifically Anglican one. Incorporation of Jews within the established Church dealt with authors' national anxiety on several levels. First, it served to demonstrate that God worked primarily through national churches, thus helping to legitimise the nation state from the Bible.⁹⁰ Anglicanism and Presbyterianism structured society in England and Scotland respectively in *Miriam*.⁹¹ In *Julamerk*, Zoraide's journey to conversion began when she heard a debate between a rabbi and the Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem's chaplain.⁹² In *Judah's Lion*, England's authority was bound up with the influence of its established Church in the Holy Land. As the LJS argued, the liturgy of the Church of England seemed particularly suited to Jewish sensibilities. Imagined as a national body themselves, it logically followed that as Jews converted they would pledge their support to a national church.

Second, the link dealt both with concerns over Jewish assimilation and incorporation into English identity, and with the troubling connection between Judaism and Catholicism. In the same way that Jews often seemed to be a national faith without a national territory, refusing assimilation, so Catholicism 'was a religion without a country'.⁹³ Conversion in the novels dealt with this by incorporating Jews within the English Church and nation (as in Bristow's work), or by emphasising their continued separation as a unique nation with a future in Palestine. Here, Jews retained their nationhood, but affirmed their distinction from Catholicism by safely linking territorial possession to their national church. Like the Church of England, they once more became an established faith with a national territory attached. This drew on a popular providential view among evangelical Anglicans that saw both the Church of England and state security as linked to the nation's positive treatment of Jews.⁹⁴ Some of the novels, particularly *Judah's Lion* and *Naomi*, demonstrated what Donald Lewis

has described as a 'teaching of esteem' towards Jews.⁹⁵ Where Burstein read these works as suggesting an 'historical emptiness' to Judaism, it is important to stress that they emphasised a continued, distinctive Jewish identity and the Christian duty to support this.⁹⁶ As Alick stated at the conclusion of *Judah's Lion*: 'I love England, I desire to see her noble lion supreme among the nations; and to insure this, I would see him ever closely allied to the Lion of Judah.'⁹⁷ Webb's preface to *Naomi* introduced her novel of Jerusalem's fall with a statement on its future restoration:

The signs of the present times point strongly towards the Holy Land and the once glorious city of Jerusalem . . . [God who] made them a mark for the scorn and reproach of the Gentile nations, can as easily gather them together and bring them again into their own land.⁹⁸

A national return to Palestine echoed through the novels as true Jewish national feeling that *transcended* Englishness. As Adeline told her lover Isaac:

You are a noble-minded Jew, Isaac; be a patriot Jew too. We are now fighting in a moral struggle for our country, not where we have lived and breathed alone—not that land which we have loved because in it we first saw the soft spring time, the beauty of summer skies, the brightness of heaven and the gladness of earth—but the land for which we have longed for which we have hoped and suffered—for which our souls have burned, and our hearts have beat in unison with the hearts of thousands of heroic breasts—that land for which we have lived, for which we have prayed—of which we honour the mighty exiles live, of which we love the illustrious dead.⁹⁹

This also disarmed tensions surrounding Jewish Messianism. In *Miriam*, the heroine's father Imlah was obsessed in his youth with restoring his people to Palestine, sentiments he attempted to relive through his daughter.¹⁰⁰ This appeared threatening; Imlah's 'mad enthusiasm' inspired 'passionate hatred against every class of Christian people',¹⁰¹ while

Miriam's imagination of the messiah's coming looked forward to the day when Jews would 'wave the banners of our faith amidst the bleeding heaps of those detested Christians!'¹⁰² Conversion did not destroy these hopes, but redirected them. Miriam learned of the messiah's love rather than his judgement, while Imlah's final conversion to the established Church fulfilled his dream of Jewish restoration as an Anglican. He became a missionary 'preaching the glad tidings of salvation to unbelievers in Syria, Palestine and Turkey.' As he had always wished, 'he died in the Holy Land.'¹⁰³ There was no restoration by independent political means, rather through association with England and its national Church.

Conclusion

The presentation of Catholicism and Nonconformity within these novels offers a glimpse into the complexities of English attitudes towards Jews and Jewishness in the nineteenth century. Jews were both like Catholics in their dependence on tradition and human authority, and unlike them in their repudiation of idolatry. They could be simultaneously both persecuted victims and the inquisitors. However, Christian identity was equally complex in the novels. As well as critique of nominal Christians, the novels promoted a specifically Anglican form of faith as the type of Protestantism to win Jews to Christ. These conversions set Jews clearly apart from Catholics and affirmed the importance of establishment and God's preference for national churches. In terms of social respectability, liturgical practice, and the interests of unity, the Church of England could appeal to Jews in ways impossible for Nonconformity. These appeals were also prophetic, linking the established Church's destiny to the future restoration of Anglicanised Jews to Palestine and ensuring the Church's place in God's providential plan.

These links were not progressive, and often (as in *Tonna*) directly denied the possibility or desirability of assimilation into English society. The way in which the novels

expressed these views suggests the complexity of tracking what supporting and ‘loving’ Jews actually meant for evangelicals in the first half of the nineteenth century. An end to persecution combined with a denial of ‘true’ Englishness; deep emotional connections to Jews with fear and hatred of Catholicism; condemnation of the Talmud and synagogue service with distrust of the ‘meanness’ of Nonconformist worship. The implications of what it meant to ‘remember God’s ancient people with love and compassion’¹⁰⁴ go far beyond missionary history, affecting Church controversy, intra-Protestant relations, popular literature, and anti-Catholic tension. Continuing to examine them in this wide context will add not only to our understanding of British attitudes towards Jews and Judaism, but to comprehending the nineteenth-century thought-world as a whole.

¹ Thanks to Donald M. Lewis for helpful comments on an earlier version of this article. This article draws on research funded by the Jewish Historical Society of England.

² Charlotte Tonna, *Judah’s Lion*, 3rd edn (London, Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1847), p. 61.

³ E.g. Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, ‘Protestants against the Jewish and Catholic Family, c. 1829 to c. 1860’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31:1 (2003), 333-57; David Feldman, ‘Popery, Rabbinism, and Reform: Evangelicals and Jews in Early Victorian England’, in Diana Wood (ed.), *Christianity and Judaism*, Studies in Church History, 29 (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992), pp. 379-86.

⁴ Michael Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion: ‘The Jewish Question’ and English National Identity* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 17-22.

⁵ See Martin Spence, *Heaven on Earth: Reimagining Time and Eternity in Nineteenth-Century British Evangelicalism* (Eugene, OR, Pickwick Publications, 2015).

⁶ E.g. *Helps to Self-Examination and Prayers on Different Subjections, for the Use of Humble-Minded and Inquiring Jews* (London, A. Macintosh, 1819).

⁷ *Jewish Expositor and Friend of Israel*, 1:6 (July 1816), 208-39.

⁸ This was the most common Anglican model, and one way of drawing a distinction between ‘enthusiastic’ conversions among Nonconformists. See Elisabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1979), pp. 59-65.

⁹ The most famous case was Joseph Wolff (1795-1862), who studied at Rome and later became a monk in Fribourg. In 1819 he moved to London and converted to Anglicanism, before serving as a missionary in Asia in the 1840s.

¹⁰ E.g. *Jewish Expositor*, 3:11 (November 1818), 410-17; *Jewish Expositor*, 14:1 (January 1829), 6 or the LJS tract *Two Letters from a Merchant in London to his Friend in Amsterdam* (London, B. Goakman, 1819).

¹¹ E.g. *Jewish Expositor*, 13:11 (November 1828), 414-16; *Jewish Expositor*, 14:4 (April 1829), 134-7.

¹² Reprinted in *Jewish Expositor*, 1:4 (April 1816), 148.

¹³ *Jewish Expositor*, 14:2 (February 1829), 63.

¹⁴ See Andrew Crome, *Christian Zionism and English National Identity, 1600-1850* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2018); Heidi Kaufman, *English Origins, Jewish Discourse, and the Nineteenth-Century British Novel: Reflections on a Nested Nation* (University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009); Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion*; Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century Literary Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ See Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion*, pp. 22-6.

¹⁶ Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, pp. 195-201.

¹⁷ See the introduction to Annie Webb's *Julamerk: A Tale of the Nestorians* (London, Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1852), pp. i-iv, where she claims the novel aims to encourage Christian charity towards the Nestorians.

¹⁸ Rachel Howard, 'Domesticating the Novel: Moral-Domestic Fiction, 1820-1834', Ph.D. thesis, Cardiff University, 2007.

¹⁹ E.g. Amelia Bristow, *The Orphans of Lissau and Other Interesting Narratives* (London, T. Gardiner and Son, 1830), p. 1; Annie Webb, *Naomi: The Last Days of Jerusalem*, 12th edn (London, Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1854), 'Preface'.

²⁰ Chalken wrote to William Blackwood about publication from 1826-28. Although he claimed his sister wrote the novel, Blackwood and his reviewers attributed it to Chalken. See National Library of Scotland, MS 4020, fol. 84.

²¹ Howard, 'Domesticating the Novel', pp. 200-5.

²² E.g. Ella Dzelzainis, 'Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, Pre-Millenarianism, and the Formation of the Ten Hours Campaign', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31:1 (2003), 181-91; Joanne Nystrom Janssen, "'Embodying Facts": Anxiety About Fiction in the *Christian Lady's Magazine* and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's Social Problem Novels', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 44:4 (2011), 327-53; Hilary L. Rubinstein, 'A Pioneering Philosemite: Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna (1790-1846) and the Jews', *Jewish Historical Studies*, 35 (1996-1998), 103-118.

²³ Published serially in the *Christian Lady's Magazine*; published as a novel in 1843.

²⁴ Joseph Shadur, *Young Travelers to Jerusalem: An Annotated Survey of American and English Juvenile Literature on the Holy Land, 1785-1940* (Ramat Gan, Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jerusalem Studies, 1999), pp. 78-81.

²⁵ Charlotte Anley, *Miriam: Or, The Power of Truth*, 2nd edn (London, John Hatchard and Son, 1829), pp. 108-46. Several sections provide readers with a summary of Thomas Scott's commentary.

²⁶ Amelia Bristow, *Emma de Lissau: A Narrative of Striking Vicissitudes and Peculiar Trials*, 4th edn (London, T. Stevenson, 1837), e.g. pp. 89-100, 235-42.

²⁷ Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion*, p. 16.

²⁸ Bristow, *Sophia de Lissau*, p. iv. Nonetheless, in the sequel Bristow admits that 'many persons consider the narrative of Sophia an ingenious fiction' (*Emma de Lissau*, pp. 248-9).

²⁹ Osborn W. Trenery Heighway, *Leila Ada, The Jewish Convert: An Authentic Memoir* (London, Partridge, Oakley, & Co., 1854), p. xv.

³⁰ Valman, *Jewess*, pp. 66-7.

³¹ Asahel Grant, *The Nestorians; or, The Lost Tribes* (London, John Murray, 1841).

³² Osborn W. Trenery Heighway, *Adeline: Or, Mysteries, Romance and Realities of Jewish Life*, 2 vols (London, Partridge, Oakey, & Co., 1854). As *The Athenaeum* commented witheringly in their review, 'we will spare our readers the comedy', (May 1854), 651-2.

³³ Lewis Hippolytus Joseph Tonna, *A Memoir of Charlotte Elizabeth* (New York, M. W. Dodd, 1848), pp. 11-14.

³⁴ Valman, *Jewess*, p. 56.

³⁵ Webb, *Julamerck*, p. 34.

³⁶ Tonna, *Judah's Lion*, p. 59.

³⁷ Bristow, *Emma de Lissau*, p. 298.

³⁸ Burstein, 'Jewish and Catholic Family', p. 344.

³⁹ Webb, *Julamerck*, p. 55.

⁴⁰ Heighway, *Adeline*, vol. 1, p. 35.

⁴¹ Bristow, *Emma de Lissau*, p. 236.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁴⁴ Heighway, *Adeline*, vol. 1, p. 71.

⁴⁵ Tonna, *Judah's Lion*, p. 256.

⁴⁶ Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion*, pp. 127-73; Carol Margaret Davison, *Anti-Semitism and Gothic Literature* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), pp. 77-81.

⁴⁷ On the links between the Gothic and anti-Catholic novels, see Susan M. Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 27-32.

⁴⁸ Heighway, *Adeline*, vol. 1, pp. 300-31.

⁴⁹ Tonna, *Judah's Lion*, pp. 356-62.

⁵⁰ Webb, *Julamerck*, p. 42.

⁵¹ Michael Wheeler, *The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 31-3.

⁵² Feldman, 'Popery', 379-86.

⁵³ David B. Ruderman, 'Towards a Preliminary Portrait of an Evangelical Missionary to the Jews: The Many Faces of Alexander McCaul (1799-1863)', *Jewish Historical Studies*, 47:1 (2015), 62-65.

⁵⁴ Davison, *Anti-Semitism*, pp. 55-86.

⁵⁵ Burstein, 'Protestants', 339.

⁵⁶ Joseph Wolff, *Joseph Wolff's Appeal to his Brethren, the Jews of Great Britain* (London, A. Macintosh, 1826), p. 26.

⁵⁷ Bristow, *Emma de Lissau*, p. 318.

⁵⁸ Tonna, *Judah's Lion*, p. 133.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁶⁰ Heighway, *Leila Ada*, p. 10.

⁶¹ Bristow, *Orphans of Lissau*, p. 84.

⁶² Webb, *Naomi*, p. 132. On this, see Valman, *Jewess*, p. 70.

⁶³ Bristow, *Sophia de Lissau*, p. 73.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 282, 288.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

⁶⁷ Tonna, *Judah's Lion*, p. 217.

⁶⁸ [C. W. Chalken], *The Hebrew, A Sketch in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh, W. Blackwood, 1828), pp. 55-9.

⁶⁹ Anley, *Miriam*, pp. 125-6.

⁷⁰ Heighway, *Leila Ada*, p. 178.

⁷¹ Burstein, 'Protestants', 339; See also Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion*, pp. 39-40.

⁷² Bristow, *Orphans of Lissau*, p. 103.

⁷³ Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion*, pp. 34-6.

⁷⁴ Bristow, *Emma de Lissau*, pp. 89-140.

⁷⁵ Heighway, *Leila Ada*, pp. 141-95.

⁷⁶ On this, see François Soyer, 'Emotion and the Popularization of Anti-Jewish Discourse in Early Modern Europe', in Christian von Scheve, Anna Lea Berg, Meike Haken, Nur Yasemin Ural (eds), *Affect and Emotion in Multi-Religious Secular Society* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2020).

⁷⁷ Tonna, *Judah's Lion*, pp. 332-6.

⁷⁸ Recalling reactions to the Society's financial crisis that caused the split, Charles Simeon remarked sardonically 'The dissenting part of the managers then took to the long boat, and the Churchmen set to work at the pumps.' Quoted in W. T. Gidney, *The History of the*

London Society from Promoting Christianity Amongst Jews (London, London Society, 1908), p. 47.

⁷⁹ John Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), pp. 198-205.

⁸⁰ Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism*, pp. 184-190.

⁸¹ Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, pp. 46-50.

⁸² Tonna, *Judah's Lion*, p. 357.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-5.

⁸⁴ Anley is best known for investigating conditions in Australia on behalf of Elizabeth Fry (see Charlotte Anley, *The Prisoners of Australia: A Narrative* [London, J. Hatchard and Son, 1841], p. 7). While this has led to the assumption that she was a Quaker, this does not necessarily follow. Her later novel *Earlswood* (London, Thomas Hatchard, 1855) was about Tractarianism and defence of the Anglican Church, significantly described by her as 'our blessed Anglican Protestant Church' (p. 542).

⁸⁵ Anley, *Miriam*, p. 33.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁸⁷ Heighway, *Leila Ada*, p. 263.

⁸⁸ Heighway, *Adeline*, vol. 1, p. 219.

⁸⁹ Howard, 'Domesticating the Novel', 161-229.

⁹⁰ Spence, *Heaven on Earth*, pp. 154-7.

⁹¹ Anley, *Miriam*, pp. 335-6, where the Stuarts and Mr Howard praise the oversight of the established Churches in helping keep the Sabbath in both Westmoreland and Scotland.

⁹² Webb, *Julamerik*, pp. 58-9.

⁹³ Zygmunt Bauman argued that one of the key reasons for post-Enlightenment ambiguity over Jews was their identification as a nation without a national territory ('Allosemitism:

Premodern, Modern, Postmodern’, in Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (eds), *Modernity, Culture and ‘The Jew’* [Cambridge, Polity, 1998], pp. 143-56); Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism*, p. 4.

⁹⁴ Crome, *Christian Zionism*, pp. 24-7.

⁹⁵ Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 63-5.

⁹⁶ Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, “‘Not the Superiority of Belief, but Superiority of True Devotion’: Grace Aguilar’s *Histories of the Spirit*”, in Brenda Ayres (ed.), *Silent Voices: Forgotten Novels by Victorian Women Writers* (Westport, Praeger, 2003), p. 7.

⁹⁷ Tonna, *Judah’s Lion*, p. 445.

⁹⁸ Webb, *Naomi*, ‘Preface’. In the updated preface to the seventeenth edition, Webb wrote that her confidence in restoration had been vindicated. Quoting the paragraph cited here, she wrote ‘how much more emphatically may the same assertion now be made!’ *Ibid.*, p. iii.

⁹⁹ Heighway, *Adeline*, vol. 1, pp. 235-6.

¹⁰⁰ Imlah promises Miriam to the continental Jewish leader Menasseh ben Israel in marriage: the name derives from the Amsterdam rabbi who pushed for Jewish readmission to England in the 1650s.

¹⁰¹ Anley, *Miriam*, p. 4.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 383. Similarly, in *The Hebrew*, Asher ends his days working in ‘a great and interesting cause;—namely, the progress of Christianity among his Jewish brethren’ ([Chalken], *The Hebrew*, p. 216).

¹⁰⁴ Anley, *Miriam*, p. 388.