

# Undisciplining The Victorian Classroom

Peer-Reviewed Syllabus

Peer Reviewer: Mark Knight

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## Nineteenth-Century Jewish British Literature

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Meets twice weekly

### Course Overview

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Religion has remained a central topic in the field of Victorian literary studies; however, scholars tend to prioritize Christian perspectives. This course seeks to broaden student engagement with nineteenth-century religious studies by focusing on Judaism and Anglo-Jewish authors. While students may have familiarity with nineteenth-century Jewish caricatures like Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, student engagement with actual Jewish writers and issues throughout the Romantic and Victorian periods can be limited. It is especially important to read and think through issues of religious discrimination throughout the century due to prevalent, increasing antisemitism, then and now. In addition to gaining a theoretical grounding in literary and religious studies, students will engage with fiction and nonfiction by authors like Charlotte Dacre, Amy Levy, Israel Zangwill, Grace Aguilar, and Benjamin Disraeli. While classroom discussions are based on the writings of Anglo-Jews, student groups will also select and read a text that depicts Victorian Jews from the outside and prepare a presentation evaluating the novel's treatment of Jews and Judaism. Additional projects include a final seminar paper, a presentation on significant topics, a brief biography essay, and multiple reflection opportunities. This course, designed with experiential and social learning in mind, includes interactive elements like guest speakers and field trips. Ideally, this course will help students broaden religious tolerance, deepen awareness and understanding of historical and contemporary Judaism, and enhance an appreciation for an ancient monotheistic religious tradition.

We all come to this course with a degree of accumulated religious knowledge, both conscious and unconscious. With this knowledge comes biases. As a class, we will work together as a group to avoid reinforcing cultural stereotypes, replicating antisemitic discourse, and exoticizing Judaism. We seek to approach materials with curiosity and a willingness to learn. Please do not speak for others. As members of this class community, we seek to acknowledge our own biases and become humble learners who read with curiosity.

### Required Texts

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- *Grace Aguilar: Selected Writings*, ed. Michael Galchinsky, Broadview Press, 2003.
- *Reuben Sachs*, Amy Levy, ed. Susan David Bernstein, Broadview Press, 2006.

- *Children of the Ghetto*, Israel Zangwill, Wayne State University Press, 1998.
- *Zofloya, or the Moor*, Charlotte Dacre, Oxford University Press, 2008.

## Assignments

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- **Pre-Course Reflection** (5%), in which students will reflect upon their previous experiences with nineteenth-century fiction, Judaism, and religion. 1-2 pages.
- **Seminar Paper** (20%), in which you will argue an original thesis about one or more of the course materials using a theoretical framework and a bibliography of at least four peer-reviewed sources. 8-10 pages.
- **Weekly quizzes** (15%), which will be unannounced and administered in person, will hold you accountable for the readings.
- **Class glossary presentation** (15%), conducted individually or in pairs, in which you will select and research a relevant term or artifact (list provided below) and share with the class in a 3-5 minute presentation. Use at least three credible sources in this project (these need not be lengthy and may come from several encyclopedias) and provide a digital visual aid. The goal is for the class to collaboratively develop a deeper understanding of nineteenth-century Judaism. You are responsible for selecting and scheduling this presentation. Afterwards, you will upload a brief definition to our shared class glossary document.
- **Biography essay** (15%), in which students will select a nineteenth-century Anglo-Jewish writer and in approximately 3 pages outline their life, writings, and significance. Essay accompanied by a five-minute overview of the person's life, which you will share with the class.
- **Outside text literature circle project** (20%), in which you will select and read a canonical nineteenth-century fictional text that represents Jews from a non-Jewish perspective (list of potential texts below). Heidi Kaufman suggests that "Jewish discourse reflects far less about Judaism or Jewish historical subjects than about those who create and use this discourse" (2). As a group, you will read and discuss this text with attention to the use of Jewish discourse and the treatment of Judaism and Jews. Then, you will write a 4-page individual essay (half of this project) addressing this issue, including two peer-reviewed sources. For the other half of this grade, your group will cultivate a presentation for the class answering similar questions and discussing how to approach engaging with this text and its depiction of Jewishness as readers, scholars, and humans. The presentation should include the use of peer-reviewed research culled from the articles you've found individually as well as a digital visual aid.
- **Experiential Learning Reflection** (10%), in which students will write 2-3 pages reflecting on the impact of course field trips and guest speakers to the way they read this literature. What did you gain from experiential learning? This is a space to explore and answer that question.
- **Post-Course Reflection** (5%), in which students will reflect upon what they learned over the semester. 1-2 pages.

## Tentative Schedule

Please complete the assigned readings before class each day. Starting during week 2, each class period will reserve time for a scheduled glossary presentation and a scheduled biography presentation.

### **Unit 1: Theory, History, and Contexts**

*Note for UVC readers: This unit is intended to set a strong foundation for student success by 1) providing basic information about nineteenth-century Jewish individuals and issues and 2) using theoretical texts to delineate analytical lenses and define critical terms that will be useful for discussing issues of Jewish identity and Jewish literature.*

#### **Week 1:**

##### **Day 1: Syllabus**

“A Vision of Jerusalem, While Listening to a Beautiful Organ in One of the Gentile Shrines,” Grace Aguilar (in Galchinsky 196-8)

##### **Day 2: “History of the Jews in England,” Grace Aguilar, (in Galchinsky 313-353)**

##### **Pre-Course Reflection due**

#### **Week 2:**

##### **Day 1: Labor Day Holiday, no class.**

##### **Day 2: “[The Portrayal of Jews in Nineteenth-Century British Literature](#)”**

“[The Acculturation of British Jews and Their Participation in English Literary Culture](#),” Lionel Gossman

Meet Literature Circle groups

#### **Week 3:**

##### **Day 1: Guest Speaker**

“Looking Jewish, Seeing Jews,” Matthew F. Jacobson, ch. 18 in *Theories of Race & Racism: A Reader*, ed. Solomos and Back, 2000, pp. 238-252 (available in course shell)

##### **Day 2: “Are Jews White? Or, the History of the Nose Job,” Sander L. Gilman, ch. 17 in *Theories of Race & Racism: A Reader*, ed. Solomos and Back, 2000, pp. 230-237 (available in course shell)**

##### **LC Groups select and submit text for approval**

#### **Week 4:**

##### **Day 1: Field Trip: Visit to local synagogue**

##### **Day 2: From *The Spirit of Judaism*, Grace Aguilar (Galchinsky pp. 215-246)**

### **Unit 2: Romanticism and Jewish Writers**

*Note for UVC readers: Here, the course becomes chronological. In Unit 2, students engage with a Romantic Gothic novel, criticism and theory from early nineteenth-century writers, and contemporary theoretical texts that speak to Jewish issues during the Romantic period.*

**Week 5:**

**Day 1:** *Zofloya*, Charlotte Dacre (Chapters I-XVII)

**Day 2:** *Zofloya*, Charlotte Dacre (Finish)

**Week 6:**

**Day 1:** "[Civil Disabilities of the Jews](#)," Thomas B. Macaulay

"[Emancipation of the Jews](#)," William Hazlitt

"Introduction: The Meaning of Race," in *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, by George L. Mosse, 2020 (available on course shell)

**Day 2:** From [Literary Miscellanies](#), Isaac Disraeli, read pp. 257-282

**Friday: (optional) attendance of Shabbat service**

**Week 7:**

**Day 1: Guest Speaker**

"[Introduction: Who is a Jew? What is a Jew? Jewish Identity, Jewish Status, and the Challenge of Conversion](#)," David Ellinson and Daniel Gordis

**Day 2:** "[Judith Montefiore](#)," Jennifer Breger, *Jewish Women's Archive*

LCs will select and read one chapter from [The Jewish Manual, or, Practical Information in Jewish and Modern Cookery: with a Collection of Valuable Recipes & Hints Relating to the Toilette](#), Judith Montefiore. **Come to class prepared to share.**

**Week 8:**

**Day 1:** "[The Disraeli family and the history of the Jews](#)," Martin Goodman, *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 71.1 Spring 2020, pp. 141-60

From [Sybil, or the Two Nations](#), Benjamin Disraeli (Book 1, ch. 1 + Book 3, ch. 2)

**Day 2:** From *Sybil*, Benjamin Disraeli (Book 2, ch. 5 + Book 6, ch. 13)

**Biography Essays Due**

### **Unit 3: Anglo-Jewry in the Victorian Era**

*Note for UVC readers: Unit 3 centers around two Victorian Jewish women writers: Grace Aguilar and Amy Levy, while continuing to engage with relevant criticism. Student groups begin meeting regularly during this unit to discuss their outside texts.*

**Week 9:**

**Day 1:** From *The Women of Israel*, Grace Aguilar, "Introduction" and "Sarah" (in Galchinsky pp. 247-281)

"[Writers in Victorian England](#)," Nadia Valman, *Jewish Women's Archive*

**Day 2:** From *The Women of Israel*, Grace Aguilar, "Miriam" and "Deborah" (in Galchinsky pp. 281-300)

"[The 'Secret' of English Anti-Semitism: Anglo-Jewish Studies and Victorian Studies](#)," Michael Ragussis, *Victorian Studies* 40.2, 1997, pp. 295-307

**Week 10:**

**Day 1:** "Appendix D: The Jewish Question in Victorian Culture," in *Reuben Sachs* pp. 215-233

“The Jews: Myth and Counter-Myth,” George L. Mosse, ch. 14 in *Theories of Race & Racism: A Reader*, ed. Solomos and Back, 2000, pp. 196-205 (available on course shell)

**Day 2:** “Cohen of Trinity,” Amy Levy, in *Reuben Sachs* pp. 181-188

Poems by Amy Levy in *Reuben Sachs* pp. 188-192

“Jewish Humor,” Amy Levy (available on course shell)

**Week 11:**

**Day 1:** *Reuben Sachs*, Amy Levy (Chapters 1-14)

**Day 2:** *Reuben Sachs*, Amy Levy (Finish)

Half of class reserved for Literature Circles

**Unit 4: The Late Nineteenth-Century and Beyond**

*Note for UVC readers: The final unit grapples with increasing antisemitism and budding Zionism in the nineteenth century. Theoretical texts continue to inform students’ historical and critical engagement with important issues.*

**Week 12:**

**Day 1: Field Trip: Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum**

“Britain Lends a Hand,” in *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, by George L. Mosse, 2020 (available on course shell)

**Day 2:** From *Culture and Anarchy*, Matthew Arnold, Chapter IV (available on course shell)

“English Judaism: A Criticism and a Classification,” Israel Zangwill, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, July 1889, 376-407 (available on course shell)

Half of class reserved for Literature Circles

**Week 13:**

**Day 1:** *Children of the Ghetto*, Israel Zangwill (Book I Chs. I-XIII)

**Day 2:** *Children of the Ghetto*, Israel Zangwill (Book I Chs. XIV-XXV)

Half of class reserved for Literature Circles

**Week 14:**

**Day 1: Guest Speaker**

Half of class reserved for Literature Circles

**Field Trip Reflections Due**

**Day 2:** *Thanksgiving Break, no class*

**Week 15:**

**Day 1:** *Children of the Ghetto*, Israel Zangwill (Book II)

**Literature Circles Individual Essays Due**

**Day 2:** [“What Makes Jewish Literature ‘Jewish’? Ilan Stavans on Belonging, Bookishness, and Memory,”](#) Ilan Stavans

**Seminar Papers Due**

**Final Exam Time:**

**Literature Circles Presentations. Post Course Reflections Due.**

## **Building a Class Glossary**

Here is a list of artifacts pre-approved for the class glossary project. Others may be accepted with written permission from me.

- Ashkenazim
- Baron Lionel de Rothschild
- Bat/Bar Mitzvah
- Bevis Marks Synagogue
- Board of Deputies of British Jews
- Brighton Regency Synagogue
- Conversion Societies
- Gordon Riots
- Great Synagogue
- Haggadah
- Halakhah
- Jewish Enlightenment
- Jewish Naturalization Act
- Kaddish
- Mezuzah
- Midrash
- Passover
- Purim
- Rabbi
- Ramsgate
- Religious Opinions Relief Bill
- Rosh Hashanah
- Sephardim
- Shabbat
- Shiva
- Talmud
- Torah
- Yiddish
- Yom Kippur
- Westminster Jews' Free School

Check out the [Victorian Jewish Writers Project](#) for more ideas.

## **Potential Works for Outside Text Project**

Maria Edgeworth, *Harrington* (1817)

Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* (1819)

Charles Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820)

Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (1837-9) or *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5)

Charles Kingsley, *Hyppatia* (1853)

Anthony Trollope, *The Way We Live Now* (1875)

George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (1876)

Other relevant works will be permitted with written consent.

*Note for UVC readers: If this course were adapted for a graduate setting, I would shift the outside text group project to an individual assignment and replace the quizzes and/or reflection opportunities with a book review of one of the following:*

Bar-Yosef, Eitan and Nadia Valman, eds. "The Jew" in *Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture: Between the East End and East Africa* (2009).

Cheyette, Brian. *Constructions of 'the Jew' in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875–1945* (1996).

Cheyette, Brian and Nadia Valman, eds. *The Image of the Jew in European Liberal Culture, 1789–1914* (2004).

Dwor, Richa. *Jewish Feeling: Difference and Affect in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Women's Writing* (2015).

Endelman, Todd M. and Tony Kushner, eds. *Disraeli's Jewishness* (2002).

Glassman, Bernard. *Benjamin Disraeli: The Fabricated Jew in Myth and Memory* (2003).

Hetherington, Naomi, and Nadia Valman, eds. *Amey Levy: Critical Essays* (2010).

Ragussis, Michael. *Theatrical Nation: Jews and Other Outlandish Englishmen in Georgian Britain* (2010).

———. *Figures of Conversion: “The Jewish Question” and English National Identity* (1995).

Scheinberg, Cynthia. *Women’s Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* (2002).

Seidman, Naomi. *The Marriage Plot: Or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature* (2016).

Valman, Nadia. *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture* (2007).

———, ed. *Jewish Women Writers in Britain* (2014).

Weisman, Karen A. *Singing in A Foreign Land: Anglo-Jewish Poetry, 1812-1847* (2018).

*In addition to teaching graduate students the practical skill of writing an academic book review, this alternate assignment would allow students to explore topics aligned with their own research interests.*