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‘A DEATH SO NOBLE’: THE JEW AS A CHRISTIAN MARTYR IN *DANIEL DERONDA*

By Shira Carmen Aji

In her final novel, *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot attempts to provide a positive and authentic representation of Jewish identity and Jewish nationalism in Victorian England. However, her characterization of Mordecai as a visionary poetic consumptive exposes the limitations of the English language as a channel for representing non-Christian identities. Since the novel’s publication in 1876 and till today, academics and readers have debated whether the novel portrays Jewish people in a positive light or whether it is antisemitic. However, no one has considered whether the Jewish characters in the novel are truly depicted as Jewish at all. Drawing on Aamir R. Mufti’s critique of English as a constraining, controlling, and colonizing agent that distorts non-European cultural works through translation and analysis, I argue that the characterization and storyline of Mordecai align more with those of the archetypical Christian martyr than with Jewish literary traditions.

To prove my claims, I will refer to *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*, in which Mufti attempts ‘to expose and explore the relationship between English and its others’ (11). Whether European Jews today are Others is debatable, but in nineteenth-century England, there is no doubt that the majority of Jewish people were considered Others. Mufti investigates the historical, political, and cultural dominance of the English language in defining world literature and arrives at the conclusion that English is a kind of prison that we are trapped in, where English readers are the main audience, and non-English works are mediated for them through translation, thus stripping them of their original context. He explains that when works are extracted from their native language and culture and translated into English, they are adapted to fit Western expectations and ideologies. Hence, literature from non-Western societies loses its cultural specificity when integrated into the world literature canon, assimilating into English and becoming part of the homogenous world library. According to Mufti’s theory, English controls and constrains non-European or non-Western voices and, in doing so, preserves colonial power dynamics. Essentially, whether through translation or cultural colonization, the English language restricts the fully authentic portrayal of non-Western characters in literature.

Daniel Deronda is not a translated work; it is a Victorian novel. However, the Jewish ideas in the novel are inspired by translations and interpretations that unintentionally Westernize and Christianize them, creating a tension between the Hebrew original and the English imitation. To illustrate these

tensions, I will show how Mordecai, despite being the most religious Jew in the novel, fits into the template or stereotype of the Christian consumptive martyr and how his death mirrors the ultimate Victorian, Christian ‘good death’. Hence, the Jewish characters in the novel are written to fit the expectations of English language readers. I will address both the Jewish version of the martyr and what criteria are necessary for a Jewish good death to underline the differences between these opposing world views. Furthermore, I will note Eliot’s inspirations and the sources she used to write about Judaism. I will claim that these sources already reflect Christian perspectives adopted through translation to English. Finally, I will conclude by reintroducing Mufti’s claims to illuminate the significance of Mordecai’s depiction as a Christian martyr for the Jewish national project presented in the novel.

Daydreaming of Martyrs

In *Daniel Deronda*, the title character goes ‘rambling in those parts of London which are most inhabited by common Jews’ in search of a man named Ezra Cohen, the long-lost brother of Mirah, a beautiful young Jewish woman who he saved from suicide (212). As he walks the streets between ‘dingy shops and unbeautiful faces’, Deronda seems not to want to find said brother, whom ‘he particularly [desires ...] should not keep a shop’ (212–3). Deronda instead wishes for Mirah, whom he admires, to have a brother who is a different kind of Jew – a heroic, poetic, inspiring Jew. He daydreams of being ‘in quest of a beautiful maiden’s relatives in Cordova elbowed by Jews in the time of Ibn-Gebirol’ or being:

Imaginatively transported to the borders of the Rhine at the end of the eleventh century, when in the ears listening for the signals of the Messiah, the Hep! Hep! Hep! of the Crusaders came like the bay of blood-hounds; and in the presence of those devilish missionaries with sword and firebrand the crouching figure of the reviled Jew turned round erect, heroic, flashing with sublime constancy in the face of torture and death. (212)

Deronda longs to witness a ‘grandiose martyrdom’, and is disappointed by the ‘common’ Jews and Jewesses he encounters on London’s streets (212). Even when he finds a shop with Ezra Cohen written over the door, Deronda reasons ‘that all likelihood was against this man’s being Mirah’s brother’ (214). To Deronda, this Mr. Cohen is too ‘modern’ and ‘certainly not a leader among his people’, as he hopes Mirah’s brother to be (214).

Deronda unknowingly encounters Mirah’s real brother, Ezra *Mordecai* Cohen, while browsing in a second-hand bookstore. He expects ‘to see behind the counter a grimy personage showing that nonchalance about sales which

seems to belong universally to the second-hand book-business' but rather than the stereotypical Jewish shopkeeper he dreads, Deronda spies:

a figure [...] startling in its unusualness[...] a man in threadbare clothing, whose age was difficult to guess – from the dead yellowish flatness of the flesh, something like an old ivory carving [...] precisely such a physiognomy as that might possibly have been seen in a prophet of the Exile, or in some New Hebrew poet of the medieval time.
(214)

This man has an intense expression, a 'dark, far-off gaze', and is clearly suffering physically (214). His appearance throws Deronda back into fervid daydreams of bygone times when Jews were willing to die for their cause. He imagines himself 'coming upon [such a face] in some past prison of the Inquisition' (214). When they part ways, Deronda concludes that this man, is 'as different probably as a Jew could well be from [the other] Ezra Cohen' whom he thinks 'to be the most unpoetic Jew he had ever met with in books or life' (215). Deronda describes Mordecai as poetic, Ezra as prosaic, Mordecai as unusual, and Ezra as ordinary. He equates Mordecai with all manner of biblical heroes and 'martyred' Jews from across history because of the evident physical suffering Mordecai is undergoing and because of the excited passion he expresses when discussing the Hebrew language and Jewish history.

When Deronda encounters the first Mr. Cohen, he thinks that 'to find an Ezra Cohen when the name was running in your head was no more extraordinary than to find a Josiah Smith under like circumstances' (219). While readers may interpret Eliot's use of the name Josiah Smith as merely an example of a common name, akin to Ezra Cohen, her choice of 'Josiah' rather than 'John' or 'James' introduces a historical reference characteristic of Eliot's fiction. Josiah Smith was a South Carolina clergyman from colonial America who preached in the evangelical style of the Great Awakening and championed later American independence from Great Britain. He suffered a stroke after which he was barely able to preach but continued to write sermons and insisted on preaching once a month despite his disability. Furthermore, 'Smith was an earnest friend to the cause of American independence [...] his heart was awake to every movement in favor of national freedom' (Sprague 351). Namely in the American Revolution, Smith took the side of the American colonists and was taken as a prisoner of war until he was returned to Philadelphia, where he died, martyred for American independence (351). Eliot's likening of Ezra Cohen with Josiah Smith hints that this first Cohen is a false prophet – unlike the true Ezra Cohen, whom Deronda seeks, and hopes will exemplify the qualities of a Jewish religious leader, visionary, and martyr, as Josiah Smith did for America.

This portrayal of Mordecai as a poetic religious martyr was a typical literary depiction of the consumptive for Victorian readers. As Alex Tankard articulates in *Tuberculosis and Disabled Identity in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, ‘three prominent aspects of consumptive identity’ appeared in Victorian texts, ‘sentimentalized victimhood’; ‘the pious Christian deathbed’; and ‘the inspired but doomed Romantic artist’ (39). Mordecai fits into all three stereotypes of the literary consumptive. As the sentimentalized victim, he appears as a poor wretch with tuberculosis who lives on the charity of the Cohens. Mordecai has difficulty breathing and is constantly depicted as emaciated with a ‘yellow pallor’, a trembling, throaty voice, and ‘no handsome Sabbath garment’ only a ‘threadbare rusty black coat’ (Eliot 214). He is described as one who would ‘bear being hurt without making a noise’ (347).

Moreover, like the pious Christian consumptive, Mordecai does not display ‘messy tubercular symptoms’ and only suffers from shortness of breath and fatigue (Tankard 66). Similarly to *Jane Eyre*’s Helen Burns, he is oppressed by society and misunderstood by his contemporaries, but spiritually superior, ‘A good man – a wonderful man’, a ‘visionary’, a ‘prophet’ (639; 444; 472). Like Helen Burns, as he nears death, Mordecai experiences ‘a state of spiritual grace’, with his ‘brilliant eyes, sunken in their large sockets’, reflecting ‘the cherishing benignancy of a spirit already lifted into an aloofness which nullified only selfish requirements and left sympathy alive’ (Tankard 66; Eliot 701). Deronda thinks of Mordecai as an inspired but doomed Romantic artist and visionary throughout the novel. He alludes to Mordecai’s poetic nature every time he encounters him and even thinks of him ‘like a poet among people of a strange speech, who may have a poetry of their own, but have no ear for his cadence, no answering thrill to his discovery of the latent virtues in his mother tongue’, underlining his identity as an under-appreciated genius (458).

Furthermore, the epigraph of chapter 43, in which Mordecai discusses the ‘doctrine of the Cabbala’, is a poem by Keats about mortality (467). This reference to Keats can be no coincidence, as Keats was the most famous nineteenth-century poet to die of consumption and the ultimate example of the inspired but doomed Romantic artist, according to Tankard. Tankard lists the ‘important features of the Romantic association between consumption and creative genius’ as ‘youth, extreme sensitivity, and the artist’s persecution or neglect by a world too crude to appreciate him’ (68). Mordecai’s contemporaries disagree with him and his writing remains unpublished during his life with only the promise of fame after his death, deepening his connection to the doomed artist stereotype, who is misunderstood in life but appreciated posthumously.

Tankard explains that ‘sentimental, religious, and Romantic texts present consumptives as sympathetic figures who can teach non-disabled people important moral lessons [...]’ and that bodily impairment is depicted ‘as a path to spiritual growth, or as a mark of elevated sensibility or innocence [...]. The traditional religious model of consumption, in particular, gives the consumptive status as a privileged subject of spiritual enlightenment, in addition to being a valuable *memento mori* for non-disabled onlookers’ (61). This is quite apparent in Mordecai and Deronda’s relationship as Mordecai appears as a teacher figure, leading Deronda on the correct spiritual path. Mordecai is imbued with the ‘profound moral purpose’ to prepare Deronda to become a leader for the Jewish people (Tankard 61). Moreover, according to Tankard, ‘novels engaging with sentimental, religious, or Romantic models of representation require that characters with impairments suffer and die for the edification of non-disabled characters’, allowing these characters only ‘a life of victimhood and martyrdom’ (62). Mordecai’s journey embodies this narrative since only when he dies can Deronda truly step into his shoes and head East.

Deronda wanders through London, longing to find a different kind of Jew; to feel ‘the fervor of sympathy with which we contemplate a grandiose martyrdom’ (212). He thinks that if he was surrounded by the heroic, defiant Jews of history, he would not be bothered by their plain faces and dingy surroundings. Who could possibly replace ‘the reviled Jew turned round erect, heroic, flashing with sublime constancy in the face of torture and death’ for the Victorian reader? (212). What ‘grandiose martyrdom’ could parallel biblical tales of sacrifice? (212). The answer is the consumptive martyr – a sentimental, religious, romantic trope based on the Victorian Christian ideal of the good death.

The Good Death

In *Death in the Victorian Family*, Pat Jalland traces the influence of the evangelical movement on the Victorian protestant concept of ‘the good death’. She accentuates the ‘devotional literature known as the *ars moriendi*, the art of dying’, that ‘taught people how to die well, since dying was seen as a test of both courage and virtue’ (17). As Jalland mentions, ‘the most famous Anglican contribution to the genre was Bishop Jeremy Taylor’s *The Rules and Exercises of Holy Dying*, first published in 1651’, a text that George Eliot herself saw ‘as a standard reference book in Victorian homes’: Adam Bede and Dorothea, in *Middlemarch*, ‘read [it] for moral improvement’ (18). Although *Holy Dying* was written centuries earlier, in Victorian England ‘the Protestant ideal of the good death was powerfully revitalized by the Evangelical movement’, and the conventions of *Holy Dying* remained firmly in the minds of believers (19). Not

only that, but Evangelical periodicals and tracts were widely circulated, meant to teach and provide examples of ‘how to live and die well’ and ‘designed to demonstrate the earnest piety, upright character, and resigned death of dying saints’ (21).

Eliot uses several core concepts from *Holy Dying* in Mordecai’s characterization. For instance, Mordecai sets an example of ‘the value of suffering as a punishment for sins’ (18). Mordecai believes that he suffers for his father’s sins, professing: ‘Mine was the lot of Israel. For the sin of the father my soul must go into exile. For the sin of the father the work was broken, and the day of fulfilment delayed’ (469). This idea that Mordecai is suffering for someone else’s sins aligns with ‘the central teaching of the Bible for early Evangelicals’, which was ‘the doctrine of atonement, which argued that Christ died as a substitute for sinful human beings and faith in the sacrifice on the Cross was essential to salvation’ (20). Taylor writes that ‘Sickness [...] is that agony in which men are tried for a crown’, reflecting the idea that prolonged bodily suffering born without complaint prepares one for the good death (18). Mordecai also shows ‘earnest piety’ and an ‘upright character’, he prays devotedly, and he ‘will not speak even of trivial family affairs’ about the Cohens with Deronda (Jalland 21; Eliot 349, 438).

According to this evangelical Victorian version of the good death:

Death ideally should take place at home, with the dying person making explicit farewells to each family member. There should be time and physical and mental capacity for the completion of temporal and spiritual business [...]. The dying person should be conscious and lucid until the end, resigned to God’s will, able to beg forgiveness for past sins and to prove his or her worthiness for salvation. Pain and suffering should be borne with fortitude, and even welcomed as a final test of fitness for heaven and willingness to pay for past sins. (Jalland 26)

Thus, death by tuberculosis allowed the ideal conditions for the good death, as consumptives had months, if not years, to prepare for death but remained sound of mind towards the end, unburdened by feverish hallucinations or the dementia of old age. ‘Devout Christians’ even ‘preferred a long illness because it allowed time for devotional preparation by the sufferer and the family’ (28). Jalland cites Dr. Samuel Beckett, who ‘considered slow consumption an infinitely better way for the Christian to die’ and thought ‘it was delightful to witness the calm, heavenly, and truly edifying bearing, and conversation of a pious young person slowly wearing away under pulmonary consumption, sometimes described as the death of the chosen because of its gradual approach and its non-interference with the mental faculties’ (41). Mordecai certainly has ample time to prepare for death and get his affairs in

order, find his long-lost sister, and chastize his despicable father. He has time to find his disciple in the form of Deronda, teach him Hebrew, excite him with dreams of a Jewish national project, and convince him that their souls would merge upon his death.

Fictionalized portrayals of death by tuberculosis were typical in Victorian Evangelical tracts and periodicals. They were usually written in the same way, with the consumptive suffering great pain but never complaining, surrounded by family, and happy to die, much like Mordecai's deathbed scene. In the days leading to his death Mordecai is resigned and calm, saying to Deronda, 'Never mind where I die, so that I am with you' and 'Do not quit me today. I shall die before it is ended' (702). He is depicted as relaxed, peaceful, and prepared, bearing his suffering in silence, 'not even making the effort to speak, but looking at them occasionally with eyes full of some restful meaning, as if to assure them that while this remnant of breathing-time was difficult, he felt an ocean of peace beneath him' (702). Mordecai, does not disappoint and remains lucid, completing the tradition of the good death by uttering 'uplifting last words' (33):

Death is coming to me as the divine kiss which is both parting and reunion – which takes me from your bodily eyes and gives me full presence in your soul. Where thou goest, Daniel, I shall go. Is it not begun? Have I not breathed my soul into you? We shall live together. (702)

His words reflect both joy and acceptance of his passing and the completion of his soul's task on earth. Eliot does not leave it at that but instead adds another overtly Christian element in the form of a verse from *Samson Agonistes* by John Milton:

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast; no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise or blame; nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble. (702)

This quote from Milton is Christian to the core, as Jews are traditionally supposed to 'wail' and 'knock the breast' at the death of a family member, yet Deronda and Mirah remain calm and collected with their arms around Mordecai as he breathes his final laboured breaths.

In 'Good Death and Bad Death in Ancient Israel According to Biblical Lore', Klaas Spronk lists the criteria for a Jewish death to be considered 'a good death'. According to his analysis, 'what makes death good or at least acceptable is: 1. having lived a long life; 2. dying in peace; 3. continuity in

the relation with ancestors and heirs; 4. being properly buried in one's own land' (992). Most importantly, for a death to be considered good in Judaism, a person must have lived a long and fulfilling life and must have had children. Furthermore, Spronk clearly illustrates that 'within Christianity and Islam, the martyrs who died for their faith are greatly honoured and believed to be rewarded in the afterlife' but that 'the ancient Israelites were not familiar with this idea' (99). According to these criteria, Mordecai's death cannot be considered 'a good death' in Judaism, as Mordecai did not live a long and happy life, bear heirs, or reconcile with his father. It is also debatable whether he was properly buried in his own land since he dies in England, and the novel insinuates that his true homeland is in Judea. Therefore, Mordecai plainly fits the Christian ideal of the good death, not the Jewish one. Having identified Mordecai as a Christian martyr begs the question of why this occurred.

A Vision of the End

To answer the question of why Mordecai is portrayed as a Christian martyr, I will return to Mufti's critiques of the English language and discuss Dara Horn's critique of American literary critic Frank Kermode's seminal 1967 work *The Sense of an Ending*. In *People Love Dead Jews*, Horn recalls reading Kermode's book, in which he claims that readers have a 'desire for consonance', or a 'desire coherent and satisfying endings', that he believes originates in Western religion (25). However, Horn, a Jewish woman, could not reconcile this idea with Judaism. To her, 'this idea of religion imposing coherence on the world sounded absolutely nothing like the religion [she] knew best' (25). Both the Christian and Hebrew Bibles begin with the words 'In the beginning', the Christian bible 'ends with a vision of the end', while 'the Torah ends with a cliffhanger' (25). Thus, Horn concludes that Kermode's idea that religion and, therefore, literature 'give us an "ending"' is not universal at all; it's Christian' (25). Moreover, she believes that Kermode's theory of literature is persuasive only 'for English-language readers' (25).

Horn claims that these English language readers 'expect the good guys to be "saved"' or 'the main character to have an "epiphany"' or for the author 'to give us a "moment of grace"' (25). She then points out that saved, epiphany and grace are all Christian terms and concludes that 'our expectations of literature are based on Christianity – and not just Christianity, but the precise points at which Christianity and Judaism diverge' (25). In *Daniel Deronda*, our main characters, Daniel and Gwendolen, are saved, we are provided with numerous epiphanies experienced by almost every central character, and we even get more than one moment of grace, including Mordecai's death. To add to that, Mordecai represents a dead Jew, whose characterization aligns with Horn's cynical remark that dead Jews appear in literature 'to teach us about

the beauty of the world and the wonders of redemption' (26). According to Horn, the central junction where Judaism and Christianity diverge is at the end, which is traditionally fulfilled in Christian literature but not in Jewish literature. As a scholar of Yiddish literature, Horn shows how Yiddish and Hebrew narrative structures avoid having resolved endings and instead appear as a series of episodes in which nothing changes, a never-ending story, or a multi-generational tale of mystery that ends by asking further questions rather than giving readers any kind of answer. *Daniel Deronda* gives readers a partially resolved ending; Gwendolen's plot is tied up, Mordecai dies, and Deronda and Mirah get married and head East. Therefore, according to this paradigm, *Daniel Deronda* cannot fully achieve its goal of representing the Jewish experience. However, compared to Eliot's other work, the ending is quite open, as we do not know whether Gwendolen will find happiness or what Mirah and Daniel will accomplish on their travels. Therefore, the novel clumsily falls into a hybrid ending, a mix of Jewish and Christian literary traditions, leaving generations of readers frustrated. On the one hand, all the 'good' characters are saved and experience moments of grace and/or epiphanies. On the other hand, like in the Hebrew bible, 'stopping just before the Israelites' long-awaited arrival in the Promised Land', the novel ends with only a promise that the protagonist's will travel to Palestine, or some ambiguous destination in the 'East' (37). The novel does not achieve the 'never-ending story' or episodal quality of traditional Jewish literature, but also has an unsteady chronology, and lacks consonance, making it far from the fully resolved character of Christian literary tradition. Yet, ironically, as he is meant to be the ultimate representation of Judaism in the novel, Mordecai's plot is fully resolved.

If, according to Horn, English language readers expect a fully resolved ending, then according to Mufti, such readers are used to literature aligning with their cultures and ideologies. In the prologue to *Forget English!*, Mufti claims that the nationalist push for independence in the post-colonial period is not as genuine or unique as it might seem but has strong roots in European ideology. It reproduces 'a mode of modern European way of thinking about culture and society', which creates the very foundation for certain types of anti-colonial ideas to develop their own cultural and historical claims (4). This is reflected in *Daniel Deronda*, as Eliot is drawn to the new proto-Zionist ideas of her time and lends these nationalistic yearnings to Mordecai, who is set up in the novel as a kind of Jewish national martyr, dying for the sins of the 'dirty' Jewish pawn brokers and gamblers so that the Hebrew people can establish a national identity. Furthermore, Mufti argues that the institution of literature itself plays a significant role 'in the emergence [...] of the hierarchies that structure relations between societies in the modern world' (97). From this, we

can understand that English language literature is not an innocent bystander or a simple conduit from nationalist ideology; rather, it is a cornerstone and a potent source of ‘nation-thinking’ (97).

This idea that literature can be a source of nation-thinking has been explored extensively in relation to *Daniel Deronda*, which is often considered among the foremost texts that introduced proto-Zionism. It is generally acknowledged that Eliot based the character of Mordecai on her friend Emanuel Deutsch, a German scholar of Orientalism and the Talmud, who taught her Hebrew and shared secrets of the Kabbalah with her (Temple 59). Furthermore, in ‘The Kabbalah, Mordecai, and George Eliot’s Religion of Humanity’, William Baker explores the notebooks that George Eliot used while writing *Daniel Deronda*, and finds that Eliot’s primary source for Kabbalistic ideas was Christian David Ginsburg (217). Ginsburg was a scholar of ancient Hebrew texts and the foremost authority in Britain on the Masorah. However, as his first name suggests, Ginsburg converted to Christianity in the 1840s and was a devoted Christian who even worked with the London Society’s Mission to the Jews and felt that it was his life’s work to spread the Christian gospel (Seforimchatter). While Baker does not address this, it poses an additional challenge in trusting Ginsburg’s translation of Hebrew texts. As Mufti makes clear, any translation process strips a text of its original contexts and adapts it to fit Western expectations and ideologies. Moreover, when a Hebrew religious text is translated by a person who converted to Christianity and actively worked to convert others, it is especially questionable, as whether consciously or not, Ginsburg’s personal beliefs and choice of words affect the meaning of the texts.

Thus, despite Eliot’s attempts to write a novel about Jewish people, *Daniel Deronda* emerges as a product of the cultural hegemony of English, which filters and remodels the portrayal of Jewish identity within a Christian, Eurocentric structure. The oppressive dominance of English marginalizes the linguistic particularities of Yiddish, Hebrew, Ladino, or Aramaic expression through translation. So, despite being allegedly based on Jewish ideas, Mordecai’s prophetic visions are distorted by their transformation into English and by Eliot’s personal Christian perspective, reducing their authenticity. By relying on translated and mediated knowledge of Judaism and Jewish culture, such as Ginsburg’s translations and guides, Eliot essentially reframes Jewish traditions, distorting them through a lens on the other side of which they emerge as Christian. This reframing is particularly apparent in Mordecai’s dreams of a Jewish nation and national culture, which are mediated by and imbued with European nationalistic norms and ideologies and strengthened by their resemblance to images of Christian national martyrdom. As Mufti argues, a paradox is exposed when we concede that the idea of ‘the world as

an ensemble of nations and civilizations, each in possession of its own distinct textual and expressive traditions' is a European concept. He further highlights the significant irony in 'that it is on this modern European intellectual ground of a theory of literature as national institution that colonial intelligentsias have typically staked their claims to historical agency and return to national origins from the disruptions of the colonial process' (3–4).

The novel itself alludes to the compulsion of assimilating into the Western canon of World Literature. It is implied that the truth of Mordecai's soul could not be written in English, as his magnum opus was penned entirely in Hebrew, but essentially rejected by society when he is told, 'If you mean to address our learned men, it is not likely you can teach them anything' (433). Mordecai asks Deronda to translate it for him, even telling Deronda to remove him as the author, thus erasing Mordecai. By translating Mordecai's life's work into English, Deronda takes away its authenticity and turns Mordecai's visionary Hebrew work into an assimilated, homogenized, English artifact with a place on the shelf of world literature. The same thing occurs when Mordecai's Jewish soul supposedly merges with Deronda's soul, becoming an assimilated, homogenized, English soul. Reality mimics literature when Eliot takes her understanding of Hebrew texts and inserts them into the Victorian novel, reflecting the 'power and efficacy' of European ideas being 'absorbed into non-European societies undergoing dramatic transformation under direct or indirect colonial domination' (Mufti 3).

NOTES

- 1 There were exceptions to this rule, including highly influential Jewish-born people such as Benjamin Disraeli, who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom twice, Christian David Ginsburg, the foremost scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures in nineteenth century Great Britain, and other extremely wealthy Jews like Isaac Goldsmid, the Rothschilds, and those related to the Rothschild's by marriage, such as David Salomons and Moses Montifiore, who were able to climb the ranks of British society, assimilate, and mould themselves into model British gentlemen with the help of their vast funds. However, it is crucial to note that though born Jewish, Disraeli and Ginsburg both converted to Christianity and were therefore legally considered Christian and able to bypass laws and conventions that restricted Jews from entering various political, societal, and academic positions. Likewise, though undeniably influential and important members of British society, these men nevertheless experienced 'virulent' antisemitism throughout their lives and careers. Moreover, for common, practicing Jews of ordinary socio-economic standing, this kind of assimilation, influence, and acceptance into British society was unachievable to say the least.
- 2 'In order to find rest after death it is important that the deceased receives a proper funeral, just like his predecessors. This includes the traditional mourning rites. In general, mourning lasted seven days. The deceased was lamented with

cries [...]. Grief was also expressed through one's clothing. The clothes were torn, sandals and the headdress were taken off [...]. The mourner beat himself[...]' (Spronk 990–1). While Spronk is referring to ancient Jewish mourning rites, many of these traditions are still relevant.

- 3 Finding biographical information on Christian David Ginsburg was near impossible, but a brief mention of him appears in *Men and Women of the Time: A Dictionary of Contemporaries* (Hathi Trust, 1899). A more comprehensive biography appears in a podcast episode with J. J. Kimche, a Harvard Ph.D. candidate writing his dissertation on Ginsburg, who attests that no biography of Ginsburg's exists, a fact that he finds shocking considering he was Victorian England's leading scholar of Hebrew scripture. See Seforimchatter, 'With J. J. Kimche Discussing C. D. Ginsburg (1825–1914)', 19 June 2024.

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