

Forgotten terrain: Wilkie Collins's Jewish explorations

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Wilkie Collins (1824–1889) is known today almost exclusively for *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868) although in fact he has some thirty-four major books to his name and wrote well over a hundred articles, short stories and essays, and a dozen or more plays. His father, William Collins (1788–1847), Royal Academician, was a celebrated portrait and landscape painter; his younger brother, Charles Allston Collins (1828–1873), was also a painter and on the fringes of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Wilkie Collins led an unconventional and unorthodox life, living with one woman, having three children by a second, and marrying neither. He dressed flamboyantly, ate exotic foods, and maintained a cynical view of the Victorian establishment of which he almost became a part. His fiction abounds in idiosyncratic characters.¹

As Steve Farmer has noted in his “Introduction” to the Broadview edition of *The Moonstone*, Collins’s work displays cosmopolitan sympathies. For instance, his “A Sermon for Sepoys” (native Indian troops), published in his long-standing friend Charles Dickens’s *Household Words* in February 1858, treats “both the English and the Indian rebels” (the sepoys who rebelled early in 1857) “with a subdued and elegant equanimity.” Furthermore, “the understanding evident in this *Household Words* article foreshadows Collins’s sensitive and sympathetic depiction of the mysterious Indians and their culture in *The Moonstone*”, published a decade later. Collins’s “unusual empathy for things and people un-British” is also reflected in his 1869 drama *Black and White*, co-authored with the French

1 For an account of Collins’s eccentric habits, see Andrew Lycett, *Wilkie Collins: A Life of Sensation* (London: Hutchinson, 2013), 213. The authors would like to thank Professor Michael Berkowitz and his anonymous readers for their judicious suggestions on ways in which to improve earlier incarnations of this article. All quotations from Collins’s works are taken from the first English edition of the appropriate title.

actor and dramatist Charles Fechter. “Set in Trinidad in 1830, the play has an evident anti-slavery theme and ends with the hero, a mixed race slave . . . marrying the white heiress.”²

It is surprising that little attention, if any, has been given to Collins’s personal and creative engagement with a minority group much closer to home than the sepoys or mixed-race groups in the Caribbean. Collins’s contemporaries such as Dickens and George Eliot depict a minority group – British Jewish characters and Jewish history. Considerable ink has been spent on analysis of the manner in which they present them and on their personal acquaintance with the Anglo-Jewish community. Wilkie Collins is largely ignored in such studies possibly because his work does not conform to their largely binary patterns of philo- and antisemitism, and unlike, for instance, either Maria Edgeworth or Dickens, he did not feel the need to present positive Jewish characters in his work in response to written complaints.³ In his thoughtful “Free Lance” in the *Times Literary Supplement* of May 2016, Bryan Cheyette writes that “Most cultural histories before the 1990s characterized Jewish literary representation as ‘stereotypes’, ‘myths’ or ‘images’ that remained the same across the centuries. This meant that these early accounts of literary anti-Semitism were, by definition, outside of time and place, and beyond the contingencies of history”.⁴ The omission of such a discussion for a major Victorian writer such as Wilkie Collins is certainly interesting, considering that Collins met some of the most eminent figures in the Jewish community.⁵ This article will examine how

2 Steve Farmer, “Introduction”, in Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1999), 25.

3 See e.g. Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of “The Jew” in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); Anne Aresty Naman, *The Jew in the Victorian Novel: Some Relationships Between Prejudice and Art* (New York: AMS Press, 1980); Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 148–241; Derek Cohen and Deborah Heller, eds., *Jewish Presence in English Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990); and Edgar Rosenberg’s pioneering study, *From Shylock to Svengali: Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction* (Stanford, Cal: Stanford University Press, 1960), focused on stereotypes in literature. For the reasons underlying George Eliot’s relationship with Jewish characters and ideas and her portrayal of them, see William Baker, *George Eliot and Judaism* (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1975 [republished on demand by Edwin Mellen without the author’s permission]), and Baker, “Judaism”, in *Oxford Reader’s Companion to George Eliot*, ed. John Rignall (Oxford University Press, 2000), 184–6.

4 Bryan Cheyette, “Free Lance”, *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 May 2016, p. 18.

5 For a listing of some of the “highly distinguished Jews” with whom Collins became friends during the 1860s, see Lycett, *Wilkie Collins*, 212–13.

and where Jews are represented in his works; how from an early age he was introduced to English Jewry; and his subsequent social interactions with the Anglo-Jewish community.

Discussion of Collins's creative representation of Jewish characters should briefly be prefaced by an examination of the prevailing atmosphere of the time in which he lived and the manner in which Jewish characters were represented in fiction at the time by other novelists. The most familiar example is Dickens's Fagin in *Oliver Twist* (1838), introduced to his readers as "The Jew" followed by stereotypical descriptions of his physical attributes.⁶ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the much earlier tale by Maria Edgeworth, "The Good Aunt" (1801), features a criminal jeweller with the unimaginative name of Mr. Carat who is clearly of Jewish origins. Further antisemitic portraits occur in her *Castle Rackrent* (1800), *Belinda* (1801), and *The Absentee* (1812). Michael Scrivener observes that "the default position in the work of the liberal Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth was uniformly anti-Semitic, until she was provoked by the American Jew, Rachel Mordecai, into writing her remarkable novel of reversals *Harrington* (1817)." A much less prejudiced depiction of Jewish characters is also reflected in Sir Walter Scott's *Rebecca in Ivanhoe* (1819).⁷

Another novelist who has recently been the subject of attention, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, writes in a deprecating manner regarding Jews in both *John Marchmont's Legacy* and *Birds of Prey* (1867).⁸ The better-known Anthony Trollope presents his readers with a succession of stereotypical Jewish moneylenders. Mr. Benjamin in *The Eustace Diamonds* (1873) is a jeweller, moneylender, and receiver of stolen property; he is obviously Jewish and referred to throughout the novel as "the Jew" along with his equally Jewish partner in crime, Mr. Harter. Samuel Hart, "small, and oily, and black-haired and beaky-nosed" appears in *Mr. Scarborough's Family* (1883), and Mr. Levy in *Can You Forgive Her* (1864) is "a dark man, with sharp eyes, set very near to each other in his head, with a beaked nose." John Sutherland, however, among others has indicated that Trollope's presentation of his

6 See Deborah Heller, "The Outcast as Villain and Victim: Jews in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend*", in Cohen and Heller, *Jewish Presence*, 40–60.

7 Michael Scrivener, *Jewish Representation in British Literature 1780–1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 23; 124–6 for his interesting account of Scott's presentation of Rebecca; see also Michael Ragusses, *Figures of Conversion: "The Jewish Question" and English National Identity* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 95.

8 For Mrs Braddon see Ruth Morris's interesting study, *Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Belgravia, a London Magazine, and Representations of Jewish Characters and Jewish Culture 1866–1876* (Palo Alto, CA: Academica, 2014).

Jewish characters is highly complex and by no means in each instance negative.⁹ With notable exceptions, there existed an overwhelmingly hostile literary and social climate in which the Jews were generally referred to in a negative manner, illustrated by the accepted parlance for borrowing from moneylenders as “going to the Jews.” It comes almost as a surprise that Wilkie Collins’s pawnbroker in *The Moonstone*, Septimus Luker, takes on the colloquial name for “money”, “luker” (lucre), rather than an identifiably Jewish appellation.¹⁰

Collins’s Jewish encounters

Collins’s earliest Jewish contacts would probably have been in 1836, when he was twelve years old. Harriet Collins, his mother, maintained a journal of her family’s continental travels during the years 1835–37. They apparently engaged a young Jewish tutor, and the entry for 2 December 1836 records – Harriet was careless over punctuation – that a “young Jew came to take them [William and Wilkie] to see pictures so offered him a bit of biscuit he took it and rose from his chair put on his hat and said to himself a short blessing over the bread.”¹¹

Three years later, Wilkie Collins experienced a notably unfortunate introduction to members of the Jewish community in England. His father, William Collins, became a member of the Royal Academy in 1820 and subsequently its librarian until he resigned due to ill health in 1845. An eminent landscape painter, “he sought out rich and influential patrons” and had become “the epitome of respectability and propriety; he was a fervent Christian who was outraged when he saw a neighbour nailing some nectarine trees to a wall on a Sunday.”¹² Unfortunately, his “personalized form of evangelicalism, which stressed the importance of hard work, biblical study and prayer”,¹³ did not go hand-in-hand with

9 John Sutherland, “Is Melmotte Jewish?” *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 August 1995, p. 13; Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora*, 29–40; Derek Cohen, “Constructing the Contradiction: Anthony Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now*”, in Cohen and Heller, *Jewish Presence*, 61–75.

10 According to the OED (online, accessed 2 Jan. 2016), “Etymology: (either directly, or through French *lucre*) Latin *lucrum*, West Aryan root **lū-*, *leu-*, *lou-*, whence Greek [*epolauein*] to enjoy, Gothic *launs*, Old High German *lôn*, modern German *lohn* wages, reward.”

The OED instances as meaning: “Gain, profit, pecuniary advantage. Now only with unfavourable implication: gain viewed as a low motive for action; ‘pelf’, ‘filthy lucre’”.

11 See Angela Richardson, “‘Dearest Harriet’: On Harriet Collins’s Italian Journal, 1836–7”, *Wilkie Collins Society Journal* n.s. 7 (2004): 44–5.

12 Peter Ackroyd, *Wilkie Collins* (New York: Doubleday, 2015), 9.

13 Lycett, *Wilkie Collins*, 22.

philosemitism (a complex term¹⁴). Indeed, the contrary appears to have been true.

The *Jewish Chronicle* for 30 November 1888 records a distasteful anecdote having its source in the *Further Reminiscences* of the renowned painter William Powell Frith (1819–1909). Like his friend Wilkie Collins, Frith had an unconventional style of life, maintained a mistress, and had illegitimate children, although unlike Collins he had a wife.¹⁵ Frith, who knew Collins's father, remembers an incident concerning Solomon Hart (1806–1881), the historic genre painter and professor of painting at the Royal Academy from 1854 to 1863,¹⁶ who was also acquainted with Wilkie Collins.¹⁷ Frith's account is worth recording in full as a demonstration of the nature of the prejudiced atmosphere surrounding Wilkie Collins that he transcended rather than embraced.

"The following anecdote, told by Mr. Frith, unpleasant reading as it is, rests upon a foundation of fact:"

Solomon Alexander Hart was a Jew – the first and, up to the present, the last of his race ever seen in our academic ranks [i.e. the Royal Academy]. The year of Hart's election as associate I forget if I ever knew it; but it must've taken place about 1830. In the course of the new associate's round of calls, he paid his respects to an R.A. whose name I shall conceal under that of Mr. Christian. This gentleman had the reputation of being a very religious man – a constant church-goer; he also had the reputation of being of an ill-natured and jealous disposition, and famed for saying unpleasant things. Of this, Hart was fully aware; but he was not prepared for so complete an illustration of this habit as his interview afforded.

"Mr Hart," said the Academician, "I am glad to see you. You must forgive me, sir, if I say that I view your admission into our ranks with this disapproval – not, believe me, because I do not admire your art (your picture of Wolsey frowning on Buckingham I thought good – very good indeed); but I cannot conceal from myself that, as your co-religionists are neither admitted to Parliament nor to any offices of State, more especially as they are not permitted to enter the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge,

14 See Scrivener, *Jewish Representation*, 211 n. 7.

15 See Mary Cowling, "Frith, William Powell (1819–1909)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004; hereafter, ODNB), online edn, May 2009, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33278, accessed 3 Jan. 2016.

16 See Helen Valentine, "Hart, Solomon Alexander (1806–1881)", ODNB, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12489, accessed 3 Jan. 2016

17 For Wilkie's friendships with Frith and to a lesser extent Hart, see *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins: The Collected Letters* (hereafter, CL), ed. W. Baker, A. Gasson, G. Law, and P. Lewis, 4 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), 1: 408, 409.

your admission to the Royal Academy is – forgive me, my conscience compels me to speak – a matter to be deplored.”

“This was a ‘facer,’” said Hart, as he related it to me; “but it was nothing to what followed.”

Mr. Christian lived in a handsome house in the suburbs, having the advantage of a large garden, in which on the occasion of Hart’s visit, a boy was trundling a hoop. Mr. Christian tapped at the window and called the boy, who presently entered the room.

“Henry,” said the Academician, “I want you to see the new associate, Mr. Hart; this gentleman, Henry, is a Jew. I hope you bear in mind the lesson last Sunday, in which your mother instructed you so fully on the history of that misguided race. They are spoken of, you know, as ‘the wicked Jews’. Wicked, indeed, they were; for the death of our blessed Lord lies at their door. It is to that sect that this gentleman belongs.”

“Could anything,” said poor Hart, “be more un-Christian and cruel than this? It literally maddened me. Whether I said ‘Good-day’ to the brute or not I don’t know; but I declare to you I had the greatest mind to ‘call him out’. I could have shot him with pleasure.”

Mr. Christian lived to see Hart an Academician; but relations were never cordial between them, and no wonder.¹⁸

The following paragraphs come from the same article in the *Jewish Chronicle*:

The Academician who was guilty of some such observations was William Collins, R.A., who was for two years librarian of the Royal Academy, a post afterwards held by Mr. Hart. William Collins was the father of Mr. Wilkie Collins, the eminent novelist, and of the late Chas. Collins. The interview occurred in 1839 when Prof. Hart was elected an R.A. These are the words in which Hart himself relates the unpleasant episode:

“When I called upon Collins upon having been elected an R.A., he received me kindly and congratulated me on my election. He introduced me to his sons in the following manner: ‘This is Mr. Hart, whom we have just elected as an Academician. Mr. Hart is a great friend of your aunt Margaret Carpenter.¹⁹ Mr. Hart is a Jew, and the Jews crucified our Saviour; but he is a very good man for all that and we shall see something more of him now. He has abstained from coming here although he has

18 W. P. Frith, RA, *Further Reminiscences* (London: Richard Bentley, 1888), 132–3, quoted in the *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter, JC), 30 Nov. 1888.

19 Margaret Carpenter (1793–1872), the younger sister of Wilkie Collins’s mother, who was “the most successful English woman painter of her time.” See Richard J. Smith, “Carpenter, Margaret Sarah (1793–1872)”, ODNB, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4732, accessed 4 Jan. 2016.

been asked, but we understand the reason for his absence for which there will be no cause.' I confess I was taken aback at this very singular style of introduction. I said nothing and withdrew. A few days afterwards Mrs. Carpenter informed me how annoyed Collins was at what he had said and had consulted her upon the course to adopt by way of an apology. In reply I assured Collins, who was very religious, that it occurred to me that he had taken the opportunity to impress upon his sons an historical transaction, and to offer me to them as an illustration of that event, irrespective of my sensibility. I begged him to dismiss from his mind any idea that I entertained towards him any unkind feeling."

In spite of such an inauspicious beginning, the Collins family and the young Wilkie in particular seem to have remained in touch with Hart over the next few years. Wilkie wrote to his mother on 13 September 1845 during one of his jaunts to Paris: "I have scarcely been 'all alone by myself' an hour at a time since my arrival. Yesterday, in *sweating* through the Louvre . . . I met – Solomon Alexander Hart. R.A." Three days later, their paths crossed once again at the English bookshop and publisher's Galignani's Library. The following week, Collins wrote to his mother with a curious message from Hart to be conveyed to his father: "Hart leaves Paris today. He hopes the governor has found some *sandbanks* to paint as he is in the field as a purchaser. (This was his message, what it means I know not)."²⁰

Hart's portraits include that of Sir David Salomons (1797–1873), the philanthropist and MP for Greenwich (1851–55 and 1859–73), who was appointed the first Jewish Lord Mayor of London in 1855 and made a baronet in 1869.²¹ His country residence since 1829 had been at Broom Hill, Southborough, near Tunbridge Wells in Kent and near where Wilkie Collins's mother had gone to live in her declining years. Collins wrote to his elderly mother in a letter dated 14 December 1866 that she should "accept Alderman Salomon's" Christmas "invitation for me with thanks" (CL 2: 55).

In spite of Collins senior's death in 1847, the family relationship with Hart continued. Wilkie Collins concludes a September 1867 letter to his mother: "Hart sends his love. He will soon be at Southborough" (Baker and Clarke, 2: 293). By 6 December, he was planning holiday celebrations: "One thing I have *determined* to do, which is to dine with you [his mother]

20 Wilkie Collins, *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, ed. William Baker and William M. Clarke (hereafter, Baker and Clarke), 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1999), 1: 27, 32.

21 See Geoffrey Alderman, 'Salomons, Sir David, baronet (1797–1873)', ODNB, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24562, accessed 5 Jan. 2016.

on Christmas Day. Hart is going to the Alderman's. Ask the Alderman [Salomons] to ask us also – and let us be jolly" (CL 2: 93).

Wilkie Collins's mother died on 19 March 1868. He was still in touch, nevertheless, with Hart and Salomons in 1873, warmly enquiring, for instance, after the latter's health in a letter of 8 April:

My dear Hart,

Many thanks for your kind letter.

I am indeed distressed to hear of Sir David's illness. I know no one for whom I have a more sincere respect and regard, and I remember no more delightful dinner than that dinner – the welcome was so hearty, the meeting was so cordial, the whole thing was so gracefully and so charmingly done.

I shall call and inquire after said David today or tomorrow, and I hope with all my heart to hear that he is making a steady advance on the way to recovery.

When you write next to Lady Salomons, pray present the expression of my thanks and my best wishes.

The letter is signed off in a most friendly manner: "Vy truly yours/ Wilkie Collins." In spite of Collins's hopes that "Sir David . . . is making a steady advance on the way to recovery" (CL 2: 390), he died on 18 July 1873, within a few months of Collins's visit.

Sir David Salomons's title and estate passed to his nephew, David Lionel Salomons (1851–1925), an avid motorcar enthusiast, engineer, and authority on electricity.²² He married in 1882 Laura Julia de Stern (1855–1935), the younger daughter of Hermann de Stern, a London-based banker and Portuguese aristocrat.²³ According to the archives of the Salomons family,²⁴ Collins knew both David Lionel and his wife, Laura Julia. He appears, too, to have formed a friendship with Laura's brother, Alfred de Stern (b. 1852), in the late 1870s and early 1880s, inviting him to lunch at his own home in Gloucester Place and accompanying him to the theatre. Collins was also on the guest list of Baroness de Stern, Alfred's mother.

Wilkie Collins was on friendly terms with other members of the wealthy Anglo-Jewish establishment. He was a regular guest of Lady

22 See Richard Davenport-Hines, "Salomons, Sir David Lionel Goldsmid-Stern-, second baronet (1851–1925)", ODNB, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37931, accessed 5 Jan. 2016.

23 See John Orbell, "Stern family (per. c. 1830–1964)", ODNB, online edn, Oct. 2008, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53820, accessed 5 Jan. 2016.

24 Now at Broomhill, Kent, the David Salomons Museum contains the Collins–de Stern correspondence.

Louisa Goldsmid (1818–1908), the wife and cousin of Sir Francis Goldsmid (1808–1878), the first Jewish QC, eminent philanthropist, leader of the Anglo-Jewish Reform movement that broke away from Orthodoxy, and MP for Reading (1860–78). According to Geoffrey Alderman in his ODNB entry for Lady Goldsmid, “Her entire life was devoted to the advancement of women’s causes, chief among which was raising the professional status of Victorian women of the middle classes.”²⁵ Wilkie advised her over copyright matters in 1861 and in the mid-1860s was invited both to her London home in Regent’s Park, St. John’s Lodge, and to stay at her country house where he met Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1922), the artist, garden designer, and prolific horticultural journalist.²⁶ In September 1866, he wrote to Lady Goldsmid: “Your kind letter finds me just recovering from one of those severe cold’s which it is the privilege of ‘this great country’ to confer on the fortunate people who dwell in it” (CL, 2: 49). A month later, he presented her with a copy of his recently published *Armada*.²⁷

The nature of the warmth of the relationship between Wilkie Collins and Lady Goldsmid and her circle is reflected in other letters, too. In a letter dated 15 May 1865 or 1866, he jocularly responds to another invitation from her, writing “If I am alive, it is needless to say how gladly I should take my place at your table. If I am not alive, be so good as to look towards the conservatory, when the butler comes round for the first time with the Champagne. You will perceive a Luminous Appearance – with an empty glass in one hand, and a blessed rosary for Miss Jekyll in the other. That will be Me” (Baker and Clarke, 1: 257). The last known letter to her was written on 10 May 1878, eight days after the untimely death of her husband, Sir Francis, in a railway accident at Waterloo Station. Collins wrote, “Pray forgive me if I intrude too soon on your great sorrow. I will not trust myself to speak of the dreadful calamity that has fallen on you. Let me only say that I do indeed feel for you with my whole heart, and that as long as I live I shall gratefully and affectionately remember the friend whom I have lost.”²⁸

25 See Geoffrey Alderman, “Goldsmid, Sir Francis Henry, second baronet (1808–1878)”, ODNB, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10918, accessed 6 Jan. 2016; Alderman, “Goldsmid, Louisa Sophia, Lady Goldsmid (1819–1908)”, *ibid.*, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48415, accessed 6 Jan. 2016.

26 See Michael Tooley, “Jekyll, Gertrude (1843–1932)”, ODNB, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37597, accessed 6 Jan. 2016.

27 Wilkie Collins, *Armada* (1866), presentation copy in private hands.

28 Collins to Lady Goldsmid, 10 May 1878, published in Rev. Prof. Marks and Rev. Albert Löwy, *Memoir of Sir Francis Henry Goldsmid, Bart., Q.C., M.P.* (London, 1879), App. VII, p. 109; repr. in *Addenda and Corrigenda* 6, *Wilkie Collins Society Journal* (Dec. 2010): 13.

Collins was also a guest of other members of the Goldsmid family, accepting on 2 March 1870 an invitation from one of Sir Francis's sisters. Owing to the death on 9 April 1873 of his brother Charles, he declined another invitation, writing on 14 April 1873 that "I am in great affliction – I have lost my last near relation. My brother has died after an illness of a few days only." He added, "It is only the truth to say that I am not fit so soon to take the place which you were so good as to offer me at your hospitable table" (CL 2: 173, 391).

During the 1860s, various references to the Goldsmids are made in letters from Wilkie Collins to his mother. On 6 September 1861, he tells her that, in addition to going sailing, he "must pay Sir F. Goldsmid a visit in Kent – so I am not doomed to town for the rest of the Autumn" (CL 1: 247). The Goldsmids' house in Kent was Somerville, described by Wilkie in a letter to his mother dated 12 December 1861. He tells her that "The Goldsmids gave me the kindest welcome – I found the house enormous, a park stocked with deer, & all the other luxuries and magnificences of wealthy country life, including a valet to wait on me, of twice my height and ten times my dignity" (Baker and Clarke, 1: 203). There was a similar letter to his mother of 6 February 1866: "I have an idea of trying to get to you on Monday next, the 12th – to go back the following Saturday, the 17th, when I have a dinner at Sir F. Goldsmid's, which I ought to go to for they have most kindly overlooked all my shortcomings in regard to former invitations" (CL 2: 25).

The Goldsmids were not the only wealthy Anglo-Jewish family with extensive connections in the City of London known to Wilkie Collins. He was also on the social guest list of the Oppenheims, who lived in Upper Hamilton Terrace in the prosperous St. John's Wood area of London. He rejected most of their invitations on the grounds of ill health. This connection was probably through Isabelle, the daughter of Frith. Isabelle married Charles Oppenheim in October 1864. "Oppenheim was a member of an influential international banking family, originally from Frankfurt." According to Andrew Lycett, "an uncle was financier to the Khedive of Egypt, a brother went on to own the *Daily News*",²⁹ where Wilkie Collins's friend and yachting companion, Edward Frederick Smyth Pigott (1824–1895, "a lifelong friend of Collins and dedicatee of *The Dead Secret*"³⁰), "worked."

29 Lycett, *Wilkie Collins*, 264.

30 Andrew Gasson, *Wilkie Collins: An Illustrated Guide* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 122.

Furthermore, “in the wake of the Overend and Gurney [financial] crash, Charles Oppenheim had emerged as the frontman acting on behalf of the bank’s creditors”.³¹ It was recorded in *The Morning Advertiser* of 16 January 1874 that their shareholders “were so pleased with the manner in which Mr. Oppenheim had performed his duties, as a mark of their appreciation they desired to present him with £3000, which he refused to accept; but agreed to give it to the Corporation of the City of London, for the purpose of erecting a statue to the late Prince Consort.” Possibly, the financial irregularities in the bank were recast as the firm of Pizzituti, Turlington & Branca in Collins’s 1871 novella *Miss or Mrs?* This story also includes an underage elopement and harks back to the 1848 clandestine marriage, supervised by Collins, of the fifteen-year-old Henrietta Ward (1832–1924) to Edward Ward (1816–1879). Henrietta became an eminent history painter while Edward was also an artist and brother of Collins’s lifelong friend, Charles James Ward (1814–1883).³² Incidentally, the failure of Overend and Gurney – renamed the fictional “Grapnell and Co. for a million and we are totally ruined” – plays a key part in the plot functioning of Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, with its significant Anglo-Jewish content.³³

Collins’s connections with the Anglo-Jewish financial establishment also led to friends in the cultural world. For instance, he counted among his closest friendships his relationship with Frederick Lehmann (1818–1905) and, more particularly, his wife, Nina Lehmann (1830–1902). They were dedicatees of *Man and Wife* (1870), and Collins stayed with them during most of its composition at their “seven-acre estate called Woodlands in Muswell Hill, close to Highgate Woods and Hampstead Heath in North London”.³⁴ Frederick Lehmann was one of seven children of a German Jewish family originally from Hamburg. His cousin Ernest Schlesinger “became the United States agent for the Sheffield iron and steel manufacturer Naylor, Vickers in 1840.”³⁵ Schlesinger was able to

31 Lycett, *Wilkie Collins*, 264.

32 For Henrietta Ward, Charles James Ward, and Edward Ward see Pamela Gerrish Nunn, “Ward, Henrietta Mary Ada (1832–1924)”, ODNB, online edn, May 2011, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45579, accessed 9 Jan. 2016; Gasson, *Collins: Illustrated Guide*, 155. For Edward Pigott (1824–1895), who in 1874 became Examiner of Plays, and for the Wards see *CL I*: 74.

33 George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley, intro. K. M. Newton (Oxford University Press, 2014), 10.

34 Lycett, *Wilkie Collins*, 211.

35 *Ibid.*

introduce Frederick, whose sister Elizabeth he married, into the company. Frederick moved to Edinburgh where he met the evolutionary thinker, geologist, and publisher Robert Chambers (1802–1871), and in November 1852 married his eldest daughter, Nina.

Collins first met Nina through her aunt Janet Chambers (1812–1892), who had married William Henry Wills (1810–1880), the journalist and editor, and Dickens's general manager.³⁶ Collins and Nina became friends before her marriage. She and her husband always remained his close confidants, and he was a regular visitor to their house at 15 Berkeley Square when they moved to London after Frederick had become a partner in Naylor, Vickers. The Lehmanns were in turn entertained at Collins's home at 90 Gloucester Place. Frederick was a fine violinist and many of his friends came from the world of music. Lycett observes that "Frederick knew many top immigrant composers and instrumentalists", several of whom were of Jewish origin, "including Joseph Joachim, Karl Hallé, Giacomo Meyerbeer and Clara (widow of Robert Schumann)." Nina was an amateur pianist of great talent, playing in public on at least one occasion when a professional performer was indisposed. According to Lycett, "Wilkie once joked that Hallé, the founder of the eponymous orchestra, was the second-best piano player in England, after Nina".³⁷

By the mid-1860s, any formality had been dropped, and Collins called them "Fred" and the "Padrona". He invited Frederick together with his friends the painters William Holman Hunt (1827–1910) and Augustus Egg (1816–1863) to celebrate the publication of *The Woman in White* in 1860. Frederick Lehmann's brother, Rudolf (1819–1905),³⁸ was also a noted artist and in 1880 was commissioned to paint Collins's portrait as a present for Nina. Throughout their many years of friendship, Wilkie Collins maintained a lively correspondence with both Nina and Frederick. After

36 See Jane W. Stedman, "Wills, William Henry (1810–1880)", ODNB, online edn, May 2010, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29609, accessed 9 Jan. 2016. For Robert and Nina Chambers [Lehmann] see Sondra Miley Cooney, "Chambers, Robert (1802–1871)", *ibid.*, online edn, May 2014, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5079, accessed 9 Jan. 2016; see also Gasson, *Collins: Illustrated Guide*, 94, 137.

37 Lycett, *Wilkie Collins*, 211.

38 See Robyn Asleson, "Lehmann, (Wilhelm Augustus) Rudolf (1819–1905)", ODNB, online edn, May 2008, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34481, accessed 9 Jan. 2016. Also Judith Bronkhurst, "Hunt, William Holman (1827–1910)", *ibid.*, online edn, May 2014, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34058, accessed 9 Jan. 2016; Hilarie Faberman, "Egg, Augustus Leopold (1816–1863)", *ibid.*, online edn, May 2009, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8595, accessed 9 Jan. 2016.

his death, Nina wrote, "And so our poor dear genial delightful matchless old Wilkie is gone."³⁹

As a measure of how close Collins was to Frederick, Collins appointed him his executor in his 1871 will (CL 2: 268). In Boston during Collins's American reading tour of September 1873 to March 1874, he renewed his friendship with Sebastian Benzon Schlesinger, who was Frederick's cousin and also worked for Naylor, Vickers. The two bonded, and Sebastian, a highly accomplished composer, was one of the executors of Collins's last will when he died. Collins wrote to Frederick in January 1874 that Sebastian was "the brightest, nicest, kindest, little fellow I have met with for many a long day", adding that "he also makes the best cocktail in America. Vive Sebastian!" (CL 3: 4). At Collins's request, Sebastian arranged a position for his godson, Frank Ward, who helped Collins with his business affairs and arranged life insurance for him. It is hardly surprising that Collins should dedicate a book to Schlesinger; *The Haunted Hotel* (1879) is inscribed to "Mr & Mrs Sebastian Schlesinger, in Remembrance of Much Kindness and of Many Happy Days" (Baker and Clarke, 2: 416).

One other instance of Collins's empathy with those of Jewish origin associated with the cultural world of mid- and late Victorian England comes in a letter he sent to the actor and dramatist Sir Arthur Wing Pinero (1855–1934) on 28 May 1883. Pinero's initial appearance on the London stage was in the part of Darch in *Miss Gwilt*, which opened at the Globe Theatre on 25 April 1876 and was the stage adaptation of Collins's *Armada* (1866). Pinero had played the part in the provincial run at the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool. Collins's kindness to him during rehearsals he subsequently recalled: "His goodness to me, so flattering from an eminent man to a mere youth, was ever in my mind, and to this day I feel grateful to him."⁴⁰ Collins wrote to him on 28 May 1883 concerning the illness of Pinero's wife, the actress Mary Holme, who had acted in the Liverpool production of *Miss Gwilt*: "I have myself suffered so much from illness that I can sincerely sympathize with Mrs. Pinero. If I can only feel assured her ability to encounter the fatigue of rehearsing as I feel of the interest which she is good enough to take in other part – I shall be perfectly satisfied." Collins continued: "I will remember the funny actor who interested us in those past days – and I heartily congratulate him on the position to which

39 Nina Lehmann quoted in John Lehmann, *Ancestors and Friends* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962), 233.

40 Arthur Wing Pinero cited by Walter de la Mare, "The Early Novels of Wilkie Collins", in *The Eighteen-Sixties*, ed. John Drinkwater (Cambridge University Press, 1932), 69 note.

he is risen as a dramatic author.” Collins and Pinero stood together at the back of the Adelphi Theatre dress circle on 9 June 1883 during the first performance of Collins’s *Rank and Riches*. Not well received, it had only six performances.⁴¹

Apart from Rudolf Lehmann’s portrait, in 1890, the year following Collins’s death, the popular Jewish artist Walter Goodman exhibited a painting entitled *The Late Mr. Wilkie Collins at the age of 56* – that is, painted in 1880 – at the sixty-seventh annual exhibition of the Royal Society of British Artists. Goodman (1838–1912) was a student at the Royal Academy from 1851. The present location of the Collins portrait is unknown. Goodman’s mother, Julia Salaman (1812–1906), was also a noted painter, and her portrait of Sir Francis Goldsmid hangs in the council chamber of the West London Synagogue.⁴²

Wilkie Collins’s views on religion and depiction of the Jewish “Other”

Despite his father’s evangelical approach to the world, Wilkie Collins was not overtly religious throughout his life – possibly as a reaction to his father’s attitudes. He did, however, early in 1852 take issue with his friend and employer Edward Pigott, at that time the editor of *The Leader*, on the content of the newspaper and specifically on its treatment of religion and religious matters. In a lengthy letter of February 1852 to Pigott, Collins commented: “I am neither a Protestant, a Catholic – or a Dissenter – I do not desire to discuss this or that particular Creed; but I believe Jesus Christ to be the son of God.” Forever his own man, he added, “the course I have taken is my own course – no one has prompted me to it – no one has attempted to give me any advice” – perhaps a curious statement given the pressures upon him of his late father – “I act under the dictates of my own opinion – only my own” (Baker and Clarke, 1: 85–6).

Inevitably, Collins’s early work reflects some of the prejudicial atmosphere of the period in which it is written and some of the bias of those he was associating with at the time. *Antonina* (1850), his first published novel, is set in ancient Rome. Collins’s omniscient narrator writes about “the coarse execrations of drunken Gauls, the licentious witticisms of effeminate Greeks, the noisy satisfaction of native Romans, the clamorous

41 For Collins to Pinero, 28 May 1883, see *Addenda and Corrigenda* 8, *Wilkie Collins Society Journal* (Dec. 2013): 19; compare Gasson, *Collins: Illustrated Guide*, 122–3; see J. P. Wearing, “Pinero, Sir Arthur Wing (1855–1934)”, *ODNB*, online edn, Jan. 2011, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35530, accessed 9 Jan. 2016.

42 *JC*, 27 Nov. 1891, p. 16.

indignation of irritable Jews" (volume I, p. 100), and comments on "some moody Northman, some solitary Egyptian, some scheming Jew" (volume II, p. 166): at least he does not isolate one particular group for negative observation!

In his second novel, *Basil* (1852), written during the period in which he was debating with Edward Pigott religious issues and how to treat them, Collins's villain, Mannion, writes that "the modern common places current in the world are so many brazen images which society imprudently worships – like the Jews of old – in the face of the living Truth" (volume III, p. 49); previously the eponymous narrator had referred more neutrally to "the large illustrative folio about Jewish antiquities" found in the library of Basil's father (volume II, p. 232).

Zachery Thorpe (Zach), a character aged twenty in Collins's *Hide and Seek* (1854), has much in common with his creator: he is close to his mother, hostile to his overbearing religious father, frequently out at late night theatres and places of ill repute, drinks, works too at a tea broker's in the city that he desires to leave, in Collins's case to write. In the novel, Zach complains: "And here I have been, for the last three weeks, at a Tea Broker's office in the city . . . going around tea warehouses in filthy Jewish places like St. Mary-Axe . . . and a dirty junior clerk who wears Blucher boots and cleans his pen in his hair" (volume I, pp. 92–3). Zach's comment may be treated as a factual description of the London slums inhabited by poverty-stricken immigrants rather than necessarily a negative one.

In the second paragraph of the short story "A Stolen Letter", also from 1854, the first-person narrator is less than neutral. Speaking of "Mr. Frank . . . a staunch friend of mine. I had contrived to get him a little timely help for consideration, of course – in borrowing money at a fair rate of interest: in fact, I had saved him from the Jews" (in *After Dark* [1856], volume I, p. 88). The narrator is recycling the old canard that higher interest rates are charged by Jewish moneylenders.

Collins's *A Rogue's Life* first appeared in *Household Words* – always under the close editorial supervision of Dickens – in 1856 and was subsequently published as a short novel in 1879. Told in the first person, there is a preoccupation in the novella with "the Art of Caricature". The eponymous rogue and narrator, Frank Softly, after various unsuccessful professional pursuits, enters the world of forging Old Master paintings. He confesses that "sheer farce and coarse burlesque, with plenty of colour for the money, still made up the sum of what the public of those days wanted" (1879, p. 11). He encounters a forger, Mr. Ishmael Pickup, relating that "There is not the

least need to describe him – he was a Jew” (p. 42). At Pickup’s “gallery” he meets a veiled “young lady” described as “An angel on earth, sent by an inhuman father, to ask a Jew for discount! Monstrous” (p. 49). Softly recalls Pickup’s telling her “no pay, my dear, unless your Rembrandt [referring to a forged painting] is good enough to take me in” (p. 51). Satirizing speech idiosyncrasies may be perceived as par for the course in a work that contains light-hearted caricatures of forgers, counterfeiters, and the seedy side of Victorian life. Although some slight changes had been made in the 1879 republication, Collins did not feel the need to remove such passages relating to Ismael Pickup for that later version.

So the question must be asked, why do these few negative examples occur? The most obvious answer is fashion; it was the ethos, the atmosphere of the historical period in which they were written. Moneylender or pawnbroker was equated with Jew. It is noticeable that Collins’s Jewish characters are confined to pawnbrokers and moneylenders, unlike, for instance, George Eliot’s or Trollope’s diversity of Jewish characters, who range from mystics, neo-aristocrats, and musicians in the case of the former to exceedingly wealthy bankers, aspiring politicians, and swindlers in the latter. Secondly, Collins may well have been influenced by his friends in his earlier attitudes before asserting his own opinions. One of these friends was the painter Henrietta Ward. In her *Memories of Ninety Years*, she describes visits to the auctioneers Christie’s in King Street, London, where “the founder of the wonderful business was to be seen surrounded by beautiful objects of Art, and unlovely specimens of the Jewish persuasion, all smoking pipes”.⁴³ Paradoxically, however, she relates a pleasanter episode with Solomon Hart and her highly positive reaction to him: “Mr S. Hart, R.A., I had known since I was a baby. He was of Jewish origin, and remained in the Faith all his life. When he arrived suddenly whilst we were having lunch, a ham, which stood on the table, was hastily removed, and someone not knowing how to spirit it away in time, put it under the table. I was afraid all the time that some pair of feet would come in contact with it, and it should be discovered. He was very kind to me, and hung my first picture at the Royal Academy.”⁴⁴ Such an instance reveals on her part a prejudice for which she was willing to make exceptions on an individual but not on a general level. In this case Henrietta Ward did not object to Hart’s fidelity to his faith, to his refusal for example to eat ham. She specifically remembered his kindness, too.

43 Henrietta Ward, *Memories of Ninety Years* (London: Hutchinson, 1924), 31.

44 *Ibid.*, 281.

Her prejudice seems to be of a generalized stereotypical nature but one not uncommon among her contemporaries. It is an illustration of what Cheyette refers to as “the ambivalences at the heart of liberal Britain which others have called ‘the anti-Semitism of tolerance’”.⁴⁵

A third possibility is purely conjectural. In his youth, Collins was perpetually short of money, or cash, frequently writing home to have money transferred to him. The same probably would have been the case for his close friends. In 1854, he declined to purchase back the copyrights of *Antonina* and *Basil* from his publishers, Richard Bentley, for £200 because his finances were strained after a recent trip and the sales of his current novel, *Hide and Seek*, were proving slow (see CL 2: 104). There is the possibility, then, that Collins or his friends had recourse to (Jewish) moneylenders at high interest rates, as their credit was low, an experience they would have found most unpleasant.

These few instances are the only dubious comments located throughout the entire canon of Collins's prolific output of novels, short stories, plays, and more than three thousand letters and 800,000 words written to an extensive range of correspondents. In these letters, the word “Jew” occurs inconsequentially only three times. The first is in a description of “Horace Vernet's [1789–1863] last great painting ‘The Taking of Smalah’” in a letter of 6 October 1845 to his mother. Collins writes of “The Arab palanquins, the squadron of French cavalry galloping out of the picture – the frantic Jew pursued by an infuriated herd of cattle – the overthrown tents – the fainting women – the scared antelopes – the sand hills in the background – the slaughtered and slaughtering Arabs – These, and a hundred other objects incident to the terrible occasion, are all treated with equal fidelity and equal skill” (Baker and Clarke, 1: 35). The second is found in a passing reference in a letter of 16 December 1863 to his friend Anne Benson Procter, in which Collins is giving an account of his Italian travels: “On I went, like the Wandering Jew, from Rome to Naples” (CL 1: 312). It is interesting that, in a letter of May 1889, written a few months before his death in September, to Sebastian Schlesinger, who was from an emancipated, wealthy, non-religious German Jewish background, a trace of Romanticism combined with irony and fact towards the Judengasse creeps in. Welcoming his friend “back to London!” and hoping that he has “had a delightful holiday”, Collins adds: “I am sure – with only one drawback. The dear delightful old houses in the Jews' Street at Frankfurt

45 Cheyette, “Free Lance”, p. 18.

have been tumbled down by Time and Government in these later years. I say (what nobody ever says) ‘Alas!’” (Baker and Clarke, 2: 564).

Nothing that may be perceived as even remotely negative occurs for more than two decades during the course of several novels that encompass his best-known titles, *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868). Indeed, in the latter novel, Collins uses minorities such as the Brahmins in England searching for what has been stolen from them to expose “England’s conquest and commercial exploitation of India throughout the nineteenth century”. Moreover, the novel’s characters provide readers with a clear indication of the disdain Collins felt for what he saw as England’s hollow social respectability. Farmer adds in his introduction that “for Collins his sympathies clearly lay with the mysterious Indians who are in England to retrieve the stolen gem”.⁴⁶ Likeable foreign characters abound in Collins’s work, and throughout his life Collins travelled on the European continent, mainly to France – he spoke French well – but also to Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. Many of his longstanding friends were from abroad and feature significantly in his correspondence.

In *The Dead Secret* (1857), Uncle Joseph Buschmann from Germany incessantly plays his music box and offers well-meant advice; Madame Pratolungo, the French-South American, is the narrator of *Poor Miss Finch* (1872); Pesca in *The Woman in White* is Italian and determined to become an “English Gentleman”. Also in *Poor Miss Finch* there is the affable Herr Gross, a German oculist who favourably contrasts with the dour English surgeon, Mr. Sebright. Indeed, so realistic and sympathetic was his character that Collins was plagued by requests for his address.⁴⁷ Another sympathetic character, Ozias Midwinter, is from the West Indies and one of the chief protagonists in *Armada* (1866). Even the villainous and scheming Italian, Count Fosco, from *The Woman in White* has redeeming qualities, with his love for animals and music.

In his sensationalist novel *Jezebel’s Daughter* (1880), Collins pleads “for the humane treatment of lunatics”.⁴⁸ The novel is based on an unpublished melodrama from an earlier period of his work, “The Red Vial” (1856). None of the Jewish pawnbrokers that appear in it will accept a pearl necklace from the poisoner Madame Fontaine without provenance and documentation. This may be construed as a favourable judgement on the commercial morality of a group previously depicted negatively in

46 Farmer, “Introduction”, 28–9.

47 E.g., letter to Arthur Locker, editor of *The Graphic*, 18 Jan. 1872.

48 Lycett, *Wilkie Collins*, 379.

Collins's work. In Part 2, chapter eleven of *Jezebel's Daughter* the narrator, David Glenney, relates: "Madame Fontaine was not a woman easily discouraged. She turned her steps towards the noble medieval street [in Frankfurt] called the Judengasse – then thickly inhabited; now a spectacle of decrepit architectural old age, to be soon succeeded by a new Street." The tone of Collins's narrator has its similarities with the state of the area ascribed to Daniel Deronda in Eliot's novel of the same name published four years earlier than *Jezebel's Daughter*. In this novel, the reader is told that Deronda "first entered the Jewish synagogue" and "in exploring the Juden-gasse which he had seen long before, he remembered well enough its picturesque old houses; what his eyes chiefly dwelt on now were the human types there" (304). For Collins's narrative voice, the area in the past was "noble"; for George Eliot's hero in the past, it contained "picturesque old houses". Neither Collins nor George Eliot's narrative voice has a negative to express concerning the Frankfurt Jewish quarter, and the former's tends towards sentiment with the use of the words "quaint" and "excitability" to convey attitudes. Collins writes:

By twos and threes at a time, the Jews in this quaint quarter of the town clamorously offered their services to the lady who had come among them. When the individual Israelite to whom she applied saw the pearls, he appeared to take leave of his senses. He screamed; he clapped his hands; he called upon his wife, his children, his sisters, his lodgers, to come and feast their eyes on such a necklace as had never been seen since Solomon received the Queen of Sheba.

The first excitement having worn itself out, a perfect volley of questions followed. What was the lady's name? Where did she live? How had she got the necklace? Had it been given to her? and, if so, who had given it? Where had it been made? Why had she brought it to the Judengasse? Did she want to sell it? Or to borrow money on it? Aha! To borrow money on it. Very good, very good indeed; but – and then the detestable invitation to produce the reference made itself heard once more.

There is no attempt here to imitate accent or pronunciation as in the case of *A Rogue's Life*. Instead, there is an interweaving of fictional voices: that of the man she is offering the necklace to; that of Madame Fontaine.

Her answer was well conceived. "I will pay you good interest, in place of a reference", she said. Upon this, the Jewish excitability, vibrating between the desire of gain and the terror of consequences, assumed a new form. Some of them groaned; some of them twisted their fingers frantically in their hair; some of them called on the Deity worshipped by their fathers to bear witness how they had suffered, by dispensing of references in other

cases of precious deposits; one supremely aged and dirty Jew actually suggested placing an embargo on the lady and her necklace, and sending information to the city authorities at the Town Hall. In the case of a timid woman, this sage's advice might actually have been followed. Madame Fontaine preserved her presence of mind, and left the Judengasse as freely as she had entered it. "I can borrow the money elsewhere", she said haughtily at parting. "Yes", cried a chorus of voices, on answering. "You can borrow of a receiver of stolen goods." [volume III, pp. 47–9]

In this passage, even the unwashed occupy the moral high ground and an appropriate commentary is made on Madame Fontaine.

Collins's "Red Vial", the earlier drama from 1856, contains material and characters omitted from its later reincarnation as a novel. In the drama, there is a sympathetic Jewish character, Isaac Rodenberg, a merchant of Frankfort (sic). He agrees to save the embezzling Madame Bergman – renamed Madame Fontaine in the novel – from disgrace by giving her six months to repay the money she has stolen. Rodenberg tells her in melodramatic fashion and idiomatic English: "Your daughter's position touches me to the heart. I cannot condemn her – I cannot condemn any innocent creature to wretchedness at the fair beginning of life. My conscience – yes, the Jew has a conscience! – my conscience upbraids me for lending myself to a deception".⁴⁹

Conclusion

In four late novels published during the last decade or so of Collins's life, characters or narrators express favourable perceptions of Judaism, Jewish characters, and knowledge of the probable meaning of a well-known Hebrew name. In *The Black Robe* (1881), centering on the manipulative schemes of a Jesuit priest, Father Benwell, who tries to recover property he considers rightly belongs to the Catholic Church, there is an ironic passage: "You clever creature!" said Mrs. Eyrecourt, the mother of the heroine, Stella.

"How easily you see through a simple woman like me! There – I give you my hand to kiss and I will never try to deceive you again. Do you know, Father Benwell, a most extraordinary wish has suddenly come to me. Please don't be offended. I wish you were a Jew."

"May I ask why?" Father Benwell inquired, with an apostolic suavity worthy of the best days of Rome.

49 Wilkie Collins, "The Red Vial" (unpublished Ms.), British Library, London, hand-numbered page 14.

Mrs. Eyrecourt explained herself with the modest self-distrust of a maiden of fifteen. "I am really so ignorant, I hardly know how to put it. But learned persons have told me that it is the peculiarity of the Jews – may I say, the amiable peculiarity? – never to make converts. It would be so nice if you would take a leaf out of their book, when we have the happiness of receiving you here. My lively imagination pictures you in a double character. Father Benwell everywhere else; and – say, the patriarch Abraham at Ten Acres Lodge." [volume III, pp. 7–8]

In such a passage, the "Jew" becomes the positive by which the character and actions of the Jesuit Father Benwell are to be judged.

Collins's anti-vivisectionist novel, *Heart and Science* (1883), has the line: "Herod was a Royal Jew" (volume I, p. 156). In an earlier novel, *The Law and the Lady* (1875), the physically deformed Miserrimus Dexter, born without legs and forced to get around either through hopping on his hands or in a wheelchair, reveals the knowledge that "'David' means, in Hebrew, 'well beloved'" (volume II, p. 106). In *I Say No!* (1884), its omniscient narrator writes: "In her younger days, the teacher must've been a handsome woman. Her grandly-formed features still suggested the idea of Imperial beauty – perhaps Jewish in its origin" (volume I, p. 38). This is followed a little later in the novel's narrative with "noticeable features, of a Jewish cast – worn and haggard, but still preserving their grandeur of form – were visible through her veil" (volume I, p. 223).

Similar sympathetic comments may be found in the romantic novella *My Lady's Money: An Episode in the Life of a Young Lady* (1877). The narrator observes that the heroine Isabel Miller "could hardly have been further away from really understanding Moody", who is in love with her "if he has spoken Hebrew" (first book publication with *The Haunted Hotel* in 1879, volume II, pp. 75–6). In a letter of 29 April 1863 to Nina Lehmann, Collins writes, "We exchanged cheerful remarks in French (English being all Greek to him and German all Hebrew to me)". In July 1883, writing to the influential American drama critic William Winter (1836–1917) concerning the failure of his final play *Rank and Riches*, Collins lamented "pit and gallery as incapable of understanding the piece as if it had been written in Hebrew" (Baker and Clarke, 2: 459).

This review of Collins's creative and epistolary perceptions of Jews and Judaism suggests that in his earlier period he could display a moderate kind of antipathy towards both, possibly influenced by his young friends and acquaintances. Subsequently, however, his attitudes transformed almost radically and from the mid-1850s any negative views disappeared almost entirely from his works and correspondence. At no point has

evidence been found of outright antagonism of the kind displayed in the work of some of his contemporaries or immediate predecessors in the world of letters. In fact, Collins's views were consistently enlightened for the period in respect of foreigners and different cultures. It is curious that in his novels – with few exceptions if any – the profession of his Jewish characters is narrowly limited to moneylending rather than to the creative worlds of the theatre, the opera house, or other musical activities, fields in which he frequently moved in the real world. But he progresses beyond stereotyped covetousness and driving a hard bargain to respect for history, religion, and fidelity. Above all, in his personal life he was happy to mix with prominent figures in Anglo-Jewish society, some of whom became his closest friends. In fact, at the end of his life, Collins's deepest trust was demonstrated in the appointment of a Jewish executor to his final will.

This essay, in conclusion, is a case study of how complex and nuanced, or not, attitudes towards Jews could be in the life of a single individual, in this instance Wilkie Collins. We have proposed that the relatively muted prejudice found in Collins's early work has its origins in firstly the existence of casual antisemitism in the environment in which he grew up; secondly from attitudes expressed by acquaintances such as the painter Henrietta Ward and by his own father. Thirdly, from the need for young men such as those in the circles he frequented when young to go to moneylenders who may well have been Jewish and would lend at high interest rates. An explanation for the philosemitism seen in later work, or, rather, the absence of Jewish emphasis in them, lies in his not regarding real-life Jews as anything special or different from other human beings because of his personal interactions with them. He did not feel the need to single them out any more than he might have for, say, Irish or American characters. They were part of the rich complex tapestry of humanity. Collins did not feel the need to apologize for, say, a Fagin in his early work or, as did George Eliot in her final published novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), feel the need to educate readers in Jewish history, beliefs, and aspirations.⁵⁰ In short, we have presented the evidence: further discussion would be conjecture.

50 See Baker, *George Eliot and Judaism*.

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