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Hyman Hurwitz and the Possibilities and Limitations of the Sympathetic Imagination in the Work of Hazlitt, Wordsworth, and Coleridge

By Lindsay Dearing

“I have been able to bring before you what proves, as it were, but a drop in the vast ocean of Talmud—that strange, wild, weird ocean, with its leviathans, and its wrecks of golden argosies, and with its forlorn bells that send up their dreamy sounds ever and anon, while the fisherman bends upon his oar, and starts and listens, and perchance the tears may come into his eyes.”¹

—Emanuel Deutsch

The description posed by nineteenth-century Talmudist Emanuel Deutsch not only summarizes the labyrinthine qualities of the Talmud, but also its power over human emotion. For Deutsch, the Talmud, the civil and canonical supplement to the Torah, is not merely “a dull treatise,” but a work that “appeals to the imagination and the feelings, and to all that is noblest and purest” (qtd. in Hertz 69). However, an unsympathetic reader often notices only “the rugged boulders of the law which bestrew the path of the Talmud,” rather than “the blue flowers of romance,” or the parables and tales (69). Anglo-Jewish writers of the nineteenth century wrote special tracts meant to inspire sympathy and fellow feeling in their Christian colleagues, friends, and neighbors who had otherwise limited experiences with the Jews of England. Moreover, these works sought to dispel negative attitudes held by the non-Jewish community of England regarding Jewish liturgy and practices, which were often understood only as archaic rituals.

Despite desires to sympathize with the socially marginalized, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge exhibit the same questionable attitudes toward Jews as many of their contemporaries and fellow Britons; discrepancies exist between their Romantic ideas of sympathy and how these ideas worked in their poetry and their lives. Wordsworth had interactions with Jews during his time in Germany, and Coleridge maintained a long-term friendship with prominent professor and biblical scholar Hyman Hurwitz, making the limited

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sympathetic language displayed by these men all the more disappointing.

Hurwitz, acting as a figure of the uniquely English Jewish Enlightenment, balances rejection and acceptance of traditional Jewish doctrine while faithfully presenting the Talmud to his audience, composed of Christian and Jewish Britons alike. Hurwitz translated and included in his *Hebrew Tales* stories and aphorisms from both the Talmud and *midrash*, a method of biblical exegesis attributed to the rabbis who flourished from about 1 to 500 CE. Judith Page observes that Hurwitz “intended the volume to counter negative and uninformed assumptions about [rabbinic] literature in much Christian writing, and to educate British Jews in their own rich traditions” (“Hyman” 197). The appearance of the anthology in the early nineteenth century demonstrates Hurwitz’s acknowledgement of the vital need for such a transgressive work at that moment in British history.

Nineteenth-century Anglo-Jewish thought did not occur in a vacuum; rather, the Jews of England both influenced and were influenced by the activity of their fellow Britons, evidenced, for example, by some of William Hazlitt’s political writings. Hurwitz’s *Hebrew Tales*, along with its preface and affixed Essay, demonstrated that traditional Jewish wisdom harmonized with contemporary British culture. Hurwitz reclaimed the Talmud as a tradition for a new audience in order to comfortably situate Jews and Jewish culture in England (“Hyman” 197). While Coleridge’s ideas and input inspired Hurwitz’s ambitious project, one cannot overlook Coleridge’s almost anti-Semitic regarding Jews that he encountered. A complete understanding of Hurwitz and his *Hebrew Tales* illuminates the discrepancies found in the work and lives of Wordsworth and Coleridge and underscores the profound possibilities and limitations of Romantic sympathy.

ENLIGHTENMENT, NATURALIZATION, AND WILLIAM HAZLITT

The *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age* barely acknowledges the Jews of England, let

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alone their contributions to either Enlightenment or Romantic thought. The Enlightenment and the Jewish Enlightenment are often considered separately, and Jewish thought during this period is rarely included in Enlightenment discourse. These divisions are problematic, as excluding Jewish ideas and activities from the conversation conceals the interactions between British nationals and Anglo-Jews.

Understanding the complex relationship between these co-existing cultures from 1750 to 1850 begins with a discussion of Enlightenment ideas. This collection of intellectual movements concerned itself with the application of critical reasoning to human problems for the purpose of improving the human condition, which, as the Enlightenment proponents understood, would create a more equal and tolerant society and government (Fitzpatrick 299). William Hazlitt, an advocate of Jewish naturalization, was raised squarely in the tradition of Dissent, those who separated from the established Church, complete with the elevation of Enlightenment values. The rejection of Enlightenment ideas and the development of Romantic sensibilities occurred in the late eighteenth century (301), and Hazlitt managed to balance respect for the Enlightenment ideals he learned as a youth while fully embracing new Romantic sensibilities.

This mixture of seemingly disparate ideologies allowed Hazlitt to sympathize with the political plight and social standing of England's Jewish minority. Enlightenment ideals alone could not generate the sense of sympathy for the oppressed evident in Hazlitt's political writings, as Enlightenment emphasis on reason contributed to the disparagement of rabbinic literature. Both Judaism and Christianity claim that the Bible validates their doctrines; however, normative Judaism relies on the rabbis' exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures, a concept rejected not only by the Anglican Church, but also by universal Christianity (Spector 2). Anglicans believed that God created man complete with rational faculties; consequently, that ability to reason could be used to understand biblical passages that were unclear, making rabbinical exegesis unnecessary and the Talmud a target of criticism.

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As Enlightenment ideals persisted, the ability to reason threatened British national identity. Sheila Spector explains that advocates of natural religion used the idea of inherent rational faculties to reject the divine authority of the Bible entirely:

Thus, by the Romantic period, the centuries-old relationship between throne and altar was in jeopardy. The established religion had no doctrinal justification for privileging itself over the onslaught of non-Anglicans. ... Yet, paradoxically, during this same period, when Anglicanism was being undermined, the British attributed their economic progress and military prowess in no small measure to their

constitutionally established religion. (5)

Spector claims that the period became reconciliatory, that the British “experienced what has been called a ‘Romantic reformation,’ as the theological basis of Anglicanism was reconfigured to accommodate a Protestant identity with the core values of liberty and freedom” (5).

Enlightenment emphasis on reason and progress encouraged Hurwitz and his Anglo-Jewish contemporaries to consider Judaism as an intellectual endeavor appropriate in secular spheres, and the Romantic break-down of hierarchies allowed the convergence of cultures that fostered their pursuits.

The idea *to naturalize the Jews* arose from the proliferation of Enlightenment ideals. Whether to allow Jews to obtain British citizenship was a major issue of the eighteenth century, most likely due to the substantial immigration of Jews from mainland Europe between 1750 and 1815.² Settling largely in London’s East End, Jews rapidly became associated with street trades, such as peddling old clothes or with criminal activities like swindling (McCalman 563), both of which are exemplified in Romantic and Victorian writing.

This influx of European Jews prompted a dialogue about their naturalization. The Jewish Naturalization Act of 1753, which attempted alleviation of the legal and economic suffering of Jews living in Britain, was attacked viciously by its opposition. Measures meant to prevent Catholics and dissenters from obtaining property and positions of power by issuing state-required

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oaths of loyalty to the Anglican Church affected the Jews of England. The naturalization bill allowed individuals practicing Judaism to apply for a private act of naturalization without having to take the Anglican oaths, but Jews were still prohibited from holding many forms of property and public office (Singer 19-20). Parliament ratified the bill, but the opposition quickly succeeded in effecting the withdrawal.³

The failed attempt at naturalization generated debate over civil emancipation for Jews in the nineteenth century, and Romantics like Hazlitt were proponents of Jewish emancipation.⁴ Hazlitt's 1831 essay "The Emancipation of the Jews," an example of Romantic sympathy exhibited for Jews and their political situation, argues that "civil emancipation would be the logical result of the triumph of sympathetic imagination over . . . the ancient and persistent myths and stereotypes about Jews in European culture" (Page, *Imperfect* 46). He argues that one's sense of sympathy should be derived from justice. Hazlitt's portrayal of the sympathetic imagination incorporates an Enlightenment sense of progress:

The emancipation of the Jews is but a natural step in the progress of civilisation. Laws and institutions are positive things: opinions and sentiments are variable; and it is in conforming the stubbornness and

perversity of the former to the freedom and boldness of the latter, that the harmony and beauty of the social order consist. (Hazlitt 461)

Hazlitt's push for emancipation reflects his desire for democratic change and coincides with his sympathy for the oppressed and marginalized.

Hazlitt argues that British citizens are to blame for Jewish hostility, claiming, "If they are vicious it is we who have made them so. Shut out any class of people from the path to fair fame, and you reduce them to grovel in the pursuit of riches and the means to live" (462). He then eloquently describes the contradictory ways in which Britons had historically treated the Jews who lived among them, explaining that British citizens "object to their trades and modes of life; that is, we shut people up in close confinement and complain that they do not live in the open

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air.” Hazlitt decries how his fellow citizens “tear people up by the roots and trample on them like noxious weeds, and then make an outcry that they do not take root in the soil like wholesome plants,” and how they “drive [Jews] like a pest from city to city, from kingdom to kingdom, and then call them vagabonds and aliens” (462).

Hazlitt concludes his argument by illuminating for his reader the possibility of sympathy for the Jewish people and their plight in history. “The Emancipation of the Jews” makes the most direct and reasonable argument for civil emancipation found in Romantic writing. However, Hazlitt’s work does not draw from direct knowledge of or experience with Judaism. Jewish emancipation compliments his radical democratic ideology and his sympathy for the oppressed (Page, *Imperfect* 51), but it is Hurwitz who perfects Hazlitt’s ideas of imaginative sympathy; Hurwitz has both the sympathy for the oppressed and the relevant knowledge of Jewish beliefs.

HASKALAH, ANGLO-IDENTITY, AND HYMAN HURWITZ

Historical and critical depictions of the Jewish social world in England often include only assimilated aristocracy, middle-class businessmen, rag merchants, and pickpockets, excluding Jewish intellectuals—either observant or secular—and how they constructed the Jewish Enlightenment in England. Jewish intellectuals produced *Haskalah*, a response to the Enlightenment. Scholars trace the origins of *Haskalah* to Germany; Moses Mendelssohn, the son of a Torah scribe from Dessau, worked from the 1750s onward to reevaluate Judaism in accordance with the natural philosophy of non-Jewish Enlightenment thinkers (Sutcliffe 10). Proponents of the Jewish Enlightenment advanced reforms that altered the framework of traditional Jewish life; consequently, Jewish intellectuals in England both defended and rethought Judaism during the shifting intellectual climate of the late eighteenth century (Sutcliffe 10).

While many *maskilim*, adherents of the *Haskalah*, defended Judaism, not all Anglo-Jewish

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intellectuals could reconcile the structures of traditional Judaism with their Enlightenment ideals. For example, Isaac D'Israeli explicitly articulated his reasons for disassociating himself from London's Jewish community, which he found too rigid and controlling. D'Israeli wrote many tracts on Judaism, all of which are now largely forgotten, as his reputation as a scholar and writer has been all but eclipsed by the legacy of his son, Benjamin Disraeli. Like Isaac D'Israeli, with whom Hurwitz corresponded on a biblical query of D'Israeli's in 1838, Hurwitz remains one of many neglected Jewish thinkers who lived and worked in England during the Enlightenment. Hurwitz and his contemporaries expressed their Jewish identities through an encounter with English intellectual and religious currents of the period (Ruderman 3). That these figures contributed to Jewish thought in English terms further demonstrates the traversing of boundaries by Anglo-Jewish intellectuals during this period⁵.

Unlike Germany, England allowed its Jewish minority a relatively higher degree of social integration than anywhere else in Europe; many professional, educational, and social barriers had nearly disappeared by the end of the eighteenth century despite the failure of the Jewish naturalization bill. While public hostility toward both the Jewish upper and lower classes continued, all classes of English Jews began to assimilate linguistically (Ruderman 7). Hurwitz, a Polish immigrant who arrived in England sometime in the 1790s, quickly learned the intellectual and practical value of the English language (Hyman 232).

The process of translating religious texts to English and composing new texts in the language contributed significantly to the development of Anglo-Jewish intellectual life. English Jews during this period were increasingly native born and recognized the need for approaching the literary sources of their culture in English. With the relative decline of Hebrew and Yiddish as spoken and written languages for the Jews, Anglo-Jews became virtually monolingual (6). By the end of the eighteenth century, most English Jews thought about their identity almost entirely in English terms. The brand of *Haskalah* experienced was uniquely English; Anglo-Jews defined their religious and cultural identity within an English language frame of reference (7).

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Mastering English proved beneficial for Hurwitz; his success in England and outstanding character garnered financial support for the establishment of his own seminary for Jewish boys at Highgate (Hyman 232). The new academy was the only school of its kind, and Hurwitz typically had about one hundred pupils from some of the chief Jewish families of London (Hyman 232). However, attendance was usually low, and one can trace the beginning of Hurwitz's lifelong disappointment with Jewish and Hebrew education in England to this early frustration.

When Hurwitz departed from the Highgate seminary, he applied for a professorship in Hebrew at the University of London, a new university whose building was sponsored by a committee of dissenters, including Jews (Hyman 233). Whether to allow a Jew to fill the position was debated, allegedly due to "theological difficulties" (Hyman 233). Fortunately for Hurwitz, he had demonstrated his ability to assimilate with the non-Jews he lived and worked among. Hurwitz proved the most qualified of the candidates for the position of Hebrew professor; he sent copies of six of his own works with his application, all of them on Hebrew and Jewish themes. With the help of Coleridge's recommendation, he was elected professor of Hebrew language and literature at the University of London's University College in 1828 (233).

Although Hurwitz remained an observant Jew throughout his life (he attended services at the Highgate academy, and was an honorary member of the Vestry of the Great Synagogue), he was not unaffected by the air of reform filtering into England (Hyman 234). A German Jewish historian recorded Hurwitz's aid in the preparation of the first English language Reform prayer-book (Hyman 234), supporting the assertion that Hurwitz, as part of the intellectual Jewry of London, balanced respect and reverence for tradition with the change in political atmosphere.

THE IMAGINATIVE SYMPATHY OF *HEBREW TALES*

For nineteenth-century Christians, exposure to Jews was often in the form of the conversionist

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novel. Michael Ragussis notes that Robert Southey “recommended to a member of Parliament that he read, in preparation for debating Jewish Emancipation, the novel *Sophia de Lissau*, the subtitle of which defined the function of such novels: ‘A Portraiture of the Jews of the Nineteenth Century; Being an Outline of their Religious and Domestic Habits With Explanatory Notes’” (16). The novel’s preface explained that the English reading public needed this information in order to be better prepared when speaking to the Jews of Christianity. Ragussis claims that “the ideology of conversion played an important role in the parliamentary debates on Jewish civil and political disabilities” (16); novels like *Sophia de Lissau* provided information for the English public to participate in this mission and to prime a member of Parliament to engage in the debates over Jewish emancipation, as in the case of Southey’s correspondent.

The circulation of conversionist novels prompted the publication of books and essays purported to defend the Jewish people and to alleviate fears that Jews would not be loyal to England if emancipated. Published in 1833 amid the parliamentary debates on Jewish Emancipation, Isaac D’Israeli’s *The Genius of Judaism* focused attention away from conventional anti-Semitic legends to concentrate on qualities ascribed to “the English Jews,” a label that implicitly asked the English public to acknowledge the members of the Jewish community as their fellow citizens (Ragussis 178). Though D’Israeli, Hurwitz, and their contemporaries all varied in their religious devotion and financial resources, a recurrent pattern emerges in numerous texts by British Jews. While each author argues to varying degrees and utilizes different strategies, their texts affirm Jewish identity against Christian conversionist pressures (Scrivener 159).

Hurwitz, a moderate reformer, revitalized the form of the anthology, using it as a medium of transmission, preservation, and creation of tradition. *Hebrew Tales*, the first anthology of Hebrew literature in English, was published in 1826, situating Hurwitz as a pioneer in his conscious choice to promote rabbinic literature as worthy of translation (Ruderman 262). The anthology, written in a language common to all Britons with characters recognizable by both Christians and

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Jews, demonstrates how Hurwitz reimagines Jewish thought and culture as English. *Hebrew Tales* includes seventy-one moral tales taken from rabbinic literature, translated into elegant yet accessible English. Coleridge translated three of the tales, which had been previously published in *The Friend*. Also included is an appendix of rabbinic aphorisms. Hurwitz intended the tales to be read in the context of his introductory essay on “the uninspired literature of the Hebrews.”

The relatively few scholars who have written on Hurwitz agree that by referring to the literature as “uninspired” he separates the Talmud from Torah, or divine revelation; this distances Hurwitz from tradition and locates him in the burgeoning Reform Jewish movement, which claims Enlightenment origins. In addition, Hurwitz focused on stories, which deflected debates about the law contained within the Talmud. Hurwitz intended *Hebrew Tales* to educate the public and dispel anti-Semitic attitudes about the Talmud and other rabbinic literature (Page, “Hyman” 199), and he denies that Jewish tradition values the Talmud above the Bible.

In his preface, Hurwitz acknowledges that he writes to draw out sympathy for Jews by establishing common ground:

The Reader may assure himself that in the little volume here offered to him, it is the fervent wish, and has been the constant aim of the Writer, to enforce the religious and moral truths on which the best

interests of all men of all names and persuasions find their common basis and fulcrum, and with scarcely less anxiety to avoid every invidious reference to the points on which their opinions are divided. (x)

His preface⁶ sets his project in direct contrast to previous writers whose Talmudic collections “throw an odium on the ancient Hebrew works, as well as on their learned authors and their unfortunate descendants; and thus to nourish the worst feelings of human nature” (vi). A sympathetic reaction is Hurwitz’s ultimate goal, and his preface articulates his objective well.

In 1827, an anonymous review of *Hebrew Tales* was published in the *Quarterly Review*. After

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some logically reasoned criticism, the reviewer expresses admiration for Hurwitz, claiming “none will remain real Jews but such as our author—men of true piety and ardent faith, whom no disappointments can shake” (“Hebrew Tales” 101). Hurwitz acknowledges that the Talmud contains problematic passages, and the reviewer approves of Hurwitz’s realistic view of the Talmud: “Mr. Hurwitz’s own estimation of the Talmud is of course not carried to such a degree as that of the Elder Rabbis; he admits that, far from being a pure luminary, it is a ‘spotted orb,’ and fairly allows that many parts of it are defaced by absurd or objectionable matter” (101).

The reviewer’s comments reinforce Hurwitz’s rejection of the belief that the Talmud is divinely inspired, and his recognition that the Talmud is ripe with questionable commentary. The reviewer praises the Talmudic stories contained in *Hebrew Tales*, calling the collection “very amusing and instructive” (102). He illuminates Christian criticisms of Talmudic stories that mix seemingly cheerful tales with serious religious issues but maintains an overall sympathetic attitude toward *Hebrew Tales*, reflecting Hurwitz’s goals as stated in the preface and Essay.⁷

Interestingly, the American editor of the 1929 edition decided that the Essay, which he deems “apologetic and expostulatory in tone, designed to defend and expound the writings and traditions of the Rabbis,” is not an integral part of *Hebrew Tales*: “As it is no longer necessary to assume this attitude in speaking of Jewish literature, the Essay is not reprinted in the present edition” (Kohut 13-14). Disagreeing with Kohut seems appropriate in the light of Hurwitz’s objectives; it is important to preserve Hurwitz’s original intention. To claim the explanatory essay is “no longer necessary” assumes that readers of the twentieth century somehow understand rabbinic literature better than they did in the nineteenth, which seems untrue of either Jewish or non-Jewish audiences. Such a statement also implies that all who will read this Talmudic anthology will do so with an unprejudiced and sympathetic eye.

My own experience has taught me that many people are not very forgiving of the Talmud: A translator, intermediary, or apologist is often necessary. At the very least, it is important to

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recognize that Hurwitz's translations affirm the value of rabbinic literature. Judith Page argues that Hurwitz maintained "certain elements of rabbinic wisdom even as he crossed the linguistic and cultural border into English and into the world of Romantic literature and theory" ("Hyman" 199), a notable observation for two reasons. First, Page's assertion demonstrates Hurwitz's ability to translate the Jewish world of tradition into English, linguistically and culturally. Second, it envisions Hurwitz as a reformer who could transcend both Judaism and the Enlightenment; it imagines him as a Romantic figure, which becomes necessary when attempting to understand discrepancies in Romantic sympathy for Jews.

The first story, "Moses and the Lamb," sets the tone for the whole anthology and provides a common figure with which both Christian and Jewish audiences can connect. While Moses was attending Jethro's flock in the wilderness, a lamb strayed from the herd. Moses ran after the lamb and discovered it drinking from a fountain. Moses then realizes that the lamb had strayed from the herd to drink and says that if he had only known, he would have given the lamb water. To make up for this lack of intuition, Moses carries the tired lamb back to the flock (15).⁸

Hurwitz relays how "The Almighty Father of Mercies—*He* who diffused those precious drops of pity and kindness over the human heart," approved of Moses' deed (15). The same God who hardens Pharaoh's heart toward the Israelites in Exodus is here seen softening the heart of Moses toward a stray lamb. After Moses picks up the lamb, he hears God's voice:

Moses! Benevolent Moses! If a dumb animal thus excites thy compassion, how much more will the children of men! What wilt thou not do for thine own brethren! Come, henceforth thou shalt be the shepherd of my chosen flock, and teach them, by thy example, "*that the Lord is good to all, and that his mercies are over all his works*" (16).

Hurwitz's portrayal of God as "the Almighty Father of Mercies" refutes the common assumption that Judaism is a religion of law rather than love. "Moses and the Lamb" presents this false binary as ultimately contrary to Talmudic thought, and this powerful idea is reiterated

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throughout *Hebrew Tales*. This crucial story allows Hurwitz to imagine sympathy for Judaism and, by default, Jewish people, in a way that Wordsworth and Coleridge could not.

WORDSWORTH: RABBINICAL AFFINITIES AND ROMANTIC AMBIVALENCE

Notable similarities between Hurwitz's preface, Essay, and *Tales* and Wordsworth's 1802 Preface and *Lyrical Ballads* illuminate almost analogous objectives and beliefs concerning the purpose of poetry. In his preface, Wordsworth claims that "We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathise with pain it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure" (15). In speaking of misguided Talmudic collections, those who "throw odium on the ancient Hebrew works," Hurwitz implicitly justifies his anthology by acknowledging that sympathy is the direct result of pleasure (vi). For both men, the possibilities of sympathy are derived from pleasure.

Hurwitz, like Wordsworth, writes for a purpose; in the Essay, Hurwitz writes that effecting "moral improvement" (5) in his reader is his ultimate aim. Wordsworth, similarly, explains his purpose in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

. . . [I]f the views with which [these poems] were composed were indeed realised, a class of Poetry would be produced, well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and not unimportant . . . in the

quality of its moral relations: and on this account [friends] have advised me to prefix a systematic defence of the theory upon which the poems were written. (6)

For Wordsworth and Hurwitz, writing poetry is a moral endeavor, and the moral nature of the task requires necessary explanation.

More than just similar objectives, the writers create similar imagery and both understand that pleasure is derived from "simple" stories. Wordsworth's poet is "a man speaking to men," but he

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is “endued with more lively sensibility” and maintains a “greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul” than other men (13). Wordsworth’s poet processes and relays great truths to the common man, and in this respect, his poet resembles Hurwitz’s *midrashic* Moses. God chose Moses as the leader of his people because Moses was endowed with qualities necessary in someone who must serve as intermediary between God and his people, impressing further significance on Hurwitz’s choice to open his anthology with a story of Moses; Moses is perhaps the proper guide through Talmudic tales.

The Wordsworthian belief in the wisdom of children abounds in *Hebrew Tales*; their wisdom becomes instantly palpable in a Jewish environment. In “The Value of a Good Wife,” Rabbi Meir comes home to find his sons inexplicably struck dead. He bewails their sudden deaths: “My sons! The light of mine eyes, and the light of my understanding; I was your father, but ye were my teachers in the law!” (17). The very language is nearly duplicated in Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood:” “See, where ‘mid work of his own hand he lies, / Fretted by sallies of his mother’s kisses / With light upon him from his father’s eyes!” (lines 88-90). Apart from similar imagery, Wordsworth’s famous “Intimations Ode” elaborates on the wisdom of children:

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul’s immensity;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind ... (108-11)

For both Wordsworth and Hurwitz, the inherent wisdom of children illuminates the ignorance of adults.

As early as the 1950s, Lionel Trilling posed an answer for why modern readers and critics often find Wordsworth off-putting. Trilling points out that, for these readers, Wordsworth is no longer an attractive intellectual possibility: “If we ask why Wordsworth is no longer the loved poet he once was, why, indeed, he is often thought to be rather absurd and even a little despicable

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.... [T]he quality in Wordsworth that now makes him unacceptable is a Judaic quality” (119, 123). This correlation suggests that people are similarly repulsed and confused by both Wordsworth and Judaism, and for similar reasons.

Trilling, who devoured *Pirke Avot*, a tractate of the Mishnah, as a child, recognized a distinct affinity between how the Rabbis understood Torah and how Wordsworth understood nature.⁹ This association allows the reader to relate Wordsworth’s “wise passiveness” to Rabbi Hillel, whom Trilling describes as having “a peculiarly Wordsworthian personality” (127). The Wordsworthian personality, for Trilling, displays “gentleness and peace, and having about him a kind of *joy* which has always been found wonderfully attractive.” The reader finds in Hillel the Wordsworthian moral essence: the interplay between individualism and the sense of community, between an awareness of the self that must be saved and developed, and awareness that the self is fulfilled only in community (127).

Trilling’s descriptions of Rabbi Hillel are consistent with Hurwitz’s Hillel in “The Meek and the Haughty,” a tale which Hurwitz must have chosen to include in *Hebrew Tales* for those very qualities. Hurwitz describes Hillel’s “virtues of humility and meekness,” qualities reminiscent of the gentle, peaceful Wordsworthian personality. In the tale, a “heathen” addresses both Hillel and Shammai and asks to be taught the law. Shammai immediately scoffs at the request and dismisses it as impossible. We find in Hillel the more moral response: “Remember, whatever thou dislikest thyself, do not unto thy neighbors. This is the substance of the law; everything else is but its comment: now go and learn” (50). Shammai is impulsive; Hillel, on the other hand, is incapable of acting any way but wise.

Lloyd Davies suggests an updated consideration of Trilling’s ideas, claiming that the affinity includes adherence to a life of *Halakhah*, a life lived in accord with Mosaic Law.¹⁰ In understanding Torah as Law, normative Judaism and Wordsworth alike perceive the world as a realm unified by a “Divine Summons” that calls all of creation, both man and nature, to an active

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response (“Halakhic Romanticism” 63). Davies’ elaboration on Trilling’s initial observation illuminates deeper affinities than perhaps Trilling himself had recognized.

Hebrew Tales demonstrates the Romantic spiritual connection to the land, that almost pantheistic attitude of seeing and experiencing God in nature, which likens Wordsworth to the medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides: “There is, moreover, no way to apprehend Him except it be through the things He has made; for they are indicative of His existence and of what ought to be believed about Him It is therefore indispensable to consider all beings as they really are” (qtd. in Brague 82). Perhaps, as Trilling and Davies suggest, this way of communing with nature is largely no longer acceptable. These critics recognize the tendency of contemporary Western culture to judge traditional Judaism as unattractive, absurd, and despicable; *Hebrew Tales* is meant to disengage this negative portrayal of classical Judaism and Talmudic thought long held by those firmly planted in the Greco-Christian tradition.

As far as scholars can discern, Wordsworth never read a word of rabbinic literature. And yet, there exists an affinity between Wordsworth and rabbinic Judaism; to what extent does this affinity allow him to sympathize with Jews he encountered? Or does it at all? For all the possibilities presented by Romanticism, there are limits. Some critics blame the limitations of sympathy on Romantic ambivalence. William Galperin insists Wordsworth and Coleridge exhibit “benign neglect” of Jews (16), which begs the questions: benign neglect or imperfect sympathy?

Romanticism lays the groundwork for profound sympathy; conversely, the tenets of Romanticism, when in the hands of fallible human beings, are often not enough to produce full sympathy for figures so unlike oneself. Despite the revealing similarities between *Lyrical Ballads* and *Hebrew Tales*, Wordsworth exhibits ambivalence and disconnect so often noticed in Romantic writers. Bryan Cheyette explains that there are many occasions when the Romantic writers are simply paralyzed by their *inability* to transform “the Jew” (3). But does paralysis account for Wordsworth’s ambivalence?

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Evidenced by letters and journals, Wordsworth and Dorothy “sympathetically” observed the ill treatment of Jews in Germany. However, also recorded in Dorothy’s journal, on Friday, October 3, 1800, is a meeting with an old man, dressed shabbily with a striking nose, assumed to be Jewish: “He had on a coat thrown over his shoulders above his waistcoat and coat. Under this he carried a bundle and had an apron on and a night cap. His face was interesting. He had dark eyes & a long nose—John who afterwards met him at Wythburn took him for a Jew” (50-1). The travelers later discover that the man was not Jewish, but this man with the “interesting” physiognomy would be transformed into the leech gatherer from “Resolution and Independence,” for whom the narrator exhibits questionable sympathy.

The interaction with the old man in “Resolution” appears to reveal more to the narrator about himself than about the man with whom he is disinterestedly conversing. Perhaps, as some suggest, Wordsworth and the narrator are interchangeable. Hazlitt, among others, commented on Wordsworth’s inability to enter into the inner life of a character or to go out of himself, a problem which resurfaces in his poem “A Jewish Family.” Recognizing the sense of self of the person with which one wishes to sympathize is critical to the triumph of the sympathetic imagination. Wordsworth travels to the Rhineland and finds a Jewish family who, like the leech gatherer, reveal more to the reader than to the poet. In “A Jewish Family” (1828), Wordsworth observes two Jewish girls as a complete outsider, and fails to recognize their consciousness of their selves and their impoverished surroundings:

Two lovely Sisters, still and sweet
As flowers, stand side by side;
Their soul-subduing looks might cheat
The Christian of his pride:
Such beauty hath the Eternal poured
Upon them not forlorn,
Though of a lineage once abhorred,

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Nor yet redeemed from scorn. (33-40)

He cannot enter into their inner lives or go out of himself, making the poem and its ending

... this ragged group to cast

Around the dell a gleam

of Palestine, of glory past,

And proud Jerusalem! (45-48)

seems insincere and idealized. If we concur with Hazlitt's idea that the narrator is always Wordsworth, we recognize that he cares more about his own feelings toward the leech gather or the Jewish girls (and the periphery realizations the narrator has during these encounters) than he cares for these figures as human beings.

Galperin claims that Wordsworth exoticizes the Jewish girls of "A Jewish Family," but it isn't a simple matter of the cliché exoticization or eroticization of the "Oriental" or the "other." Despite Wordsworth's affinity with the rabbis and Hyman Hurwitz, an unsuccessful attempt at sympathy betrays Wordsworth's inability to fully disengage from himself to sympathize with those who are incredibly alien to him. Hurwitz not only has the ability to sympathize with figures representative of himself but also presents a faithful rendering of a situation. Hurwitz (and the Talmud by implication), presents women, not as ideals, but as people with flaws consistent with human nature. The reader of Wordsworth is painfully aware they are seeing the Jewish women through Wordsworth's eyes.

Judith Page poses multiple questions regarding sympathy: "How does one sympathize with figures viewed as foreign or portrayed as unattractive? Does the very otherness of the Jewish object complicate the workings of the sympathetic imagination?" (*Imperfect* 3). She asserts that Wordsworth's contemporaries and later generations of readers have found it ironic that the poet espoused this ideal of sympathizing with social outcasts when his poetry often unwittingly records the failure of sympathetic identification (9), and certainly, "Resolution and Independence" and "A Jewish Family" provide a record of such imperfect sympathy.

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COLERIDGE: THE UNFORTUNATE FAILURE OF THE SYMPATHETIC IMAGINATION

In his critical analysis of Coleridge's "Hymn Before Sunrise," Davies posits Coleridge as a figure of Romantic Hebraism. Davies defines this term as "the turn away from a neoclassical, Greco-Roman tradition of aesthetics and metaphysics, and toward a poetic orientation rooted in the Hebrew scriptures." Midrash, Davies explains, is rooted in the reading of Scripture, so in it we do not encounter built-in objections to a poem about religious faith. Midrash uncovers textual problems "precisely because it respects the essential integrity of the original biblical text, in which seeming errors and inconsistencies can reveal a divinely inscribed meaning. It should also be noted that midrash is often audaciously creative in finding solutions to textual problems" ("Mont Blanc" 278). It is possible that Hurwitz would not accept the idea that "errors and inconsistencies can reveal a divinely inscribed meaning," given his Enlightenment background, but he would likely acknowledge that unfavorable Talmudic representations of humanity is no reason to devalue midrash and other types of rabbinic literature.

Davies claims that "Hymn" is derived from the traditional practices of Jewish textual study, especially as represented in *midrash*. During the summer of 1802, when Coleridge composed "Hymn," he had in mind Hebrew poetics and the nature of the creative imagination ("Mont Blanc" 278). Coleridge's efforts to compose poetry in the "Hebrew mode" occurred while he was formulating, in several crucial letters, his preference for Hebrew poetry over Greek, his theoretical split with Wordsworth, and his developing concept of imagination (281). Davies is not alone in asserting that Coleridge was affected by Hebrew poetry. Ina Lipkowitz suggests that many of Coleridge's poetic works are the result of his preoccupation with Hebrew poetry, and that a closer examination of this development reveals more precisely the way in which, more than the other Romantics, Coleridge dealt specifically with a Hebrew biblical poetic heritage (614). While Coleridge demonstrated a lifelong interest in poetry from the Hebrew perspective, he was disgusted by most contemporary Jews. This disparity reflects the destructive

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romanticizing of biblical Hebrews, who become all the more ideal when contrasted with stereotypes of contemporary Jews.

In his *Table Talk*, an example of Coleridge's attitude toward Jews surfaces in an entry dated August 14, 1833: "The two images farthest removed from each other which can be comprehended under one term, are, I think, Isaiah—"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!"—and Levi of Holywell Street—"Old clothes!"—both of them Jews, you'll observe" (226). That Coleridge saw poetry of the "sublimest" sort in Isaiah (Lipkowitz 611) makes this contrast more significant. The entry demonstrates Coleridge's revulsion for Jewish rag merchants and reinforces the idea asserted by David Ruderman that relatively few historical and critical depictions of the Jewish social world in England exist outside of lower class Jews.

In 1817, fifteen years after "Hymn" and sixteen years before the *Table Talk* observation, Hurwitz and Coleridge collaborated on a Hebrew dirge to be recited at a memorial service for Princess Charlotte (Hyman 235). Coleridge's letters corroborate that the men had no relationship previous to 1817. Only two letters to Hurwitz are included in the *Collected Letters*: one written on November 23, 1817, and another written on August 5, 1818 (4: 784, 871). Coleridge and Hurwitz, who met during their time at Highgate, discovered common interests: the Bible, the Hebrew language, and philology in general (Hyman 238). That Hurwitz exerted influence on his friend from 1817 to Coleridge's death in 1834 has been almost entirely overlooked in the critical literature dealing with the last fifteen years of Coleridge's life, despite the fact that Coleridge's interpretation of Scripture is based on traditional Jewish lines and that Hurwitz's presentation of the Hebrew language figured prominently in Coleridge's late writings (Lipkowitz 607). When the possibility of Hurwitz becoming a professor of Hebrew at University College arose, Coleridge actively assisted his candidature, revealing the closeness of their relationship (Hyman 240).

However, there is a remarkable contrast in Coleridge's genuine love for Hurwitz and how he

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reacted to other Jews. Coleridge's *Table Talk* further betrays disturbing prejudices against Jews and Judaism. On July 8, 1830, Coleridge relays an anecdote that reveals much about the response to Jewish difference in England, even among those more enlightened:

The other day I was ... floored by a Jew. He passed me several times crying out for old clothes in the most nasal and extraordinary tone I ever heard. At last I was so provoked, that I said to him,

“Pray, why can't you say ‘old clothes’ in a plain way as I do now?” The Jew stopped, and looking very gravely at me, said in a clear and even fine accent, “Sir, I can say ‘old clothes’ as well as you can;

but if you had to say so ten times a minute, for an hour together, you would say ‘Ogh Clo’ as I do now;” and so he marched off. I was so confounded with the justice of his retort, that I followed and

gave him a shilling (104)

Obviously, Coleridge was surprised to hear “the Jew” speak in a manner so similar to his own way of speaking.

On the same day, Coleridge relays another disturbing situation:

Once I sat in a coach opposite a Jew—a symbol of old clothes’ bags—an Isaiah of Hollywell Street. He would close the window; I opened it. He closed it again; upon which, in a very solemn tone, I

said to him, “Son of Abraham! Thou smellest; son of Isaac! Thou art offensive; son of Jacob! Thou stinkest foully. See the man in the moon! He is holding his nose at thee at that distance; dost thou

think that I, sitting here, can endure it any longer?” My Jew was astounded, opened the window forthwith himself, and said, “he was sorry he did not know before I was so great a gentleman.” (104)

These anecdotes further reveal Coleridge's aversion to lower class Jews. The second story is particularly unsettling, because Coleridge labels his fellow passenger a Jew upon first sight and remarks on his Jewishness in combination with his remarks on the man's foul smell.

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Considering Coleridge had already forged a close friendship with a Jew, one wonders what differences there are between these rag merchants and Hurwitz. For Coleridge, Hurwitz was someone more like himself in appearance: an educated gentleman. The “old clothes men” are repulsive in sight, sound, and smell to Coleridge; it seems that, for Coleridge, it is easier to sympathize with a person of one’s own race/class or a person who is relatively beautiful (i.e., it is easier, for some, to sympathize with a Jessica than a Shylock).

While Hurwitz is Jewish and thus “not English” in appearance, he is more like Coleridge than the ragmen. Note that while the encounter with the first old clothes man betrays a bit of sympathy, Coleridge only sympathizes when he hears “the Jew” speak “his” language: “in a plain way,” with a “clear and even fine accent” (104). The old clothes men are part of the same foreign race and religion as Hurwitz, but do not atone for this infraction by presenting an acceptable image.

Sander Gilman explains why images of Jews resisted sympathetic responses. If, as the stereotypes held, Jews were ugly and alien, they were not easy or deserving objects for fellow feeling (119).¹¹ Jewish men were associated with bodily ugliness or excess, as well as unsavory commercial dealings and strange, imperfect language. They present a more negative image than Jewish women, who are more often represented as mysterious, exotic beauties, already observed in the poetry of Wordsworth; however, this image of Jewish womanhood is also evident in the work of Sir Walter Scott.

Hazlitt’s essay calls for sympathy, in the form of civil emancipation, for Jews as a group. Coleridge’s difficulty with sympathizing lies in his inability to view Jews as a group, or at the very least, seems to have separated Hurwitz from Jewish stereotypes or Jews, period. Viewing a member of a group as an individual is helpful within the realm of identity concerns but becomes problematic when attempting to evoke a sympathetic reaction for a disenfranchised

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group. Certainly, sympathizing with one individual who happens to be Jewish could affect sympathy for the whole group; however, Coleridge's friendship with Hurwitz and knowledge of Hurwitz's purpose in writing *Hebrew Tales* did not prevent the attitudes displayed in *Table Talk*, which occurred at a later date than *Hebrew Tales*'s publication.

CONCLUSION

It was Hyman Hurwitz's objective to present Jewish history and literature in such a way that elicited sympathetic responses from a non-Jewish audience, while writing to appeal to the Jewish community. Hurwitz eloquently presents a rational refutation of Talmudic criticism, while including stories that reinforce Judaism as a religion based in compassion, fellow feeling, and sympathy for all creatures. Hurwitz appeals to the sympathetic identification of Christian readers, and, as viewed in "Moses and the Lamb," he presents a Jewish teaching based on acts of loving-kindness, effectively reversing the law/love dichotomy. *Hebrew Tales* presents Jewish teaching as compatible with the values and culture of the British reading public.

Hebrew Tales situates Judaic thought within British culture and society; as a force of the *Haskalah*, Hurwitz saw a need close the gap that existed between Anglo-Jews and Anglo-Gentiles. His life exemplifies a desire to traverse boundaries between two cultures kept apart by rigid social boundaries. It might seem strange to the contemporary reader that one would need to apologize for one's religion and cultural group. However, in the case of Jews in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, it was necessary. Both Coleridge and Wordsworth were certainly subjected to the pervasive presence of anti-Judaic attitudes in British culture, and this can't be simply disregarded. However, their exposure to Jewish people, thought, and practices might have alleviated some of their ambivalence and anti-Semitism.

Wordsworth and Coleridge did not achieve sympathetic identification with Jews in the way that Hazlitt did. Despite the poets' demonstration of powerful interest in Hebrew thought, their

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encounters with real Jews reveal a disparity. Perhaps the “wordsworthian ego” was just too strong to ever allow Wordsworth to fully sympathize. Hurwitz and Coleridge could only be friends because Hurwitz was well-educated and literate, in combination with Coleridge’s romanticization of Hebraic thought. Romanticism provides opportunities and possibilities for sympathies, exemplified in the case of Hazlitt; however, as evidenced by Wordsworth and Coleridge and their reactions toward Jews and Judaism, it instills limitations, too.

Endnotes

1. Quoted in J. H. Hertz, ed., *A Book of Jewish Thoughts: Selected and Arranged by the Chief Rabbi*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1922). A well-received article by Deutsch on the Talmud appeared in the *Quarterly Review* in 1867.
2. An estimated 20,000 Jews lived in London at the end of the eighteenth century, predominantly poor Ashkenazim from Germany, Poland, and Holland, with a smaller proportion of more financially well-off Sephardim from Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy (McCalman 563).
3. Singer points out that although there were few Jews living in Great Britain at the time, a strong idea of a Jewish “other” prevailed. The anti-Jewish naturalization propagandists were able to add Jews to the “other” list by associating them with already existing religious fears (21). The debate over Jewish naturalization is important when considering the developing concept of national identity in the eighteenth-century. A pre-existing fear of Catholics and Protestant Dissenters aided opponents in their attempts to convince the British public to view themselves as ‘British nationals’ and to fear and distrust ‘foreign’ Jews (22).
4. As the son of a Unitarian minister, Hazlitt was educated for the ministry at the Dissenting academy at Hackney (McCalman 537). He failed to finish school and enter his

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intended career in 1795, but remained fiercely loyal to the Dissenting tradition (538).

5. The activity of the *maskilim*, disciples of Mendelssohn, eventually inspired Jews elsewhere to follow their example by reformulating traditional Jewish thinking in the light of Enlightenment ideals (Ruderman 3). The claim for Jewish Enlightenment among a small group of Anglo-Jews, the product of an intellectual style native to England and largely independent of German developments, offers a new challenge to the “germanocentric” model (5).

6. All subsequent references to the Essay or Preface come from the 1826 edition of *Hebrew Tales*.

7. The *Quarterly* reviewer concludes in praise of the eloquent collection of Talmudic wisdom, “Mr. Hurwitz has done well in not pressing such tales into his collection which generally consists of anecdotes of various distinguished Jewish characters. Some of the more highly interesting, and they lose nothing but some, perhaps, unpreservable touches of simplicity, in the hands of their translator” (110). The reviewer expresses his hope that, “as Mr. Hurwitz has thus opened the way, he will continue his researches in the Talmud. He well knows that there is much for him to glean there [...]” (113).

8. All subsequent quotations from the *Tales* are from the 1929 edition.

9. Trilling remarks, “What I am trying to suggest is that ... there existed for the Rabbis and for Wordsworth a great object, which is from G-d and might be said to represent Him as a sort of surrogate, a divine object to which one can be in an intimate passionate relationship, an active relationship” (127).

10. “When we penetrate the obscurities cast up by the cumulative clouds of

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post-Enlightenment life and thought and consider Wordsworthian Romanticism in conjunction with eighteenth-century Rabbinic Judaism, a surprising core of common practices and affirmations is revealed” (Davies, “Halakhic Romanticism” 61).

11. The smell of the Jews, the *foetor judaicus*, is the medieval mephitic odor always associated with the “other” (Gilman 174).

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