

## **Burke, His Liberal Rivals and the Jewish Question**

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The image of the bloody-thirsty, deracinated, deceitful Jew was a well-established and popular stereotype in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Jews in England were perceived as a social and political threat, a cancerous presence eating up the nation, due to their social position as a separatist faction and their increasing visibility in economic circles. Unsurprisingly, many writers and thinkers around this time addressed the Jewish threat by associating the children of Abraham with social and moral degeneracy, with the new capitalist order and with the nation's economic hardships. However, it was from the late eighteenth century and onwards that the perception of the Jew became more ambiguous. It was towards the turn of the century when, rather than simply following the accepted traditional stereotype, we start witnessing more clearly a division between liberals and conservatives' (re)conceptualisation of the Jew. Indeed, we find that towards the end of the eighteenth century, there were divergent ways of discussing the Jewish question. One side of the debate was the traditional and long-lasting argument encapsulated in Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which deemed the Jews' financial dealings and their presence in Britain as a threat to Britain's national solidarity. The other side of the debate voiced Philo-Semitic sentiments and advocated Jewish integration into Britain as part of the wave of liberalism and tolerance overtaking the country.<sup>1</sup> Thus, by the turn of the century,

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Granville's figuring of the clownish Jew was completely abandoned and Charles Macklin's blood-thirsty Jew, which still resonated in people's imagination, was joined by the figure of the benevolent Jew. The end of the eighteenth century opened its arms and mind to more favourable Jewish characters. What began with Beaumont and Fletcher's 1647 *The Custom of the Country* continued over a hundred years later with the production of Richard Cumberland's *The Jew* (1794) and *The Jew of Mogadore* (1808). The virtuous figure of Sheva, in Cumberland's 1794 drama, was a monumental success at the turn of the century and was joined by other positive portrayals of Jews on stage and in literature, which abandoned and challenged the negative image of the Jew as Shylock.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that these cultural productions are devoid of contradictions and discrepancies in their dealings with the Jew. But even if we regard the problems these publications and stage productions present to today's scholars, during the time they originated the positive character of the Jew supported and reinforced the liberal call for tolerance.<sup>3</sup>

The tolerant attitudes towards Jews and other minority groups in Britain around this time are related to the liberal sentiments vibrating throughout the nation after the French Revolution, which helped reinforce the political struggle for social and civil equality. The call for equality demanded social and legal recognition of all the cultural and religious minorities residing in the British

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<sup>1</sup> The argument in favour of Jewish integration mainly rested on the assumption that the Jews' financial connections and wealth would benefit Britain. For the arguments in favour of Jews and Jewish capital consult Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, p. 220 and Neville Hoad, 'Maria Edgeworth's *Harrington*: The Price of Sympathetic Representation.'

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Dibdin's dramas, *The Jew and the Doctor* and *The School of Prejudice*, are just a couple of examples in this tradition of tolerance. In literature, Maria Edgeworth published her apologetic *Harrington* (1817) and Sir Walter Scott his *Ivanhoe* (1819), both considered amongst the first literary works which portrayed Jews in a favourable light. Edmund Kean, in 1814, introduced to theatregoers his humane and sympathetic rendition of Shylock, seeing in Shylock 'the tragedy of a man who had been wronged' (Cioni 2010, 153).

<sup>3</sup> For detailed discussions concerning the problematic representation of the Jew as a positive and benevolent character see Judith W Page's *Imperfect Sympathies* and my article 'Imagining the Other.'

nation. It is with this perception of the other as a deserving equal that we start seeing the positive image of the Jew entering the literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The image of the benevolent Jew, who earns his fellow Christians' respect and admiration, was set to counter the shylockian myth and the conservatives' fear of the threat of the other. Nevertheless, the division between liberal and conservative, with regards to the Jewish question, was not as straightforward. As I aim to show, the liberal call itself was embedded with discrepancies and contradictions, which jeopardised the main objective of equality to all. As I will claim, even those who argued in favour of equality for all the marginal groups in society tended to resort to the traditional stereotypes of the Jew, utilised by their conservative political rivals. This tendency in the liberal discourse not only excluded the Jews from the call for tolerance, but also presented the Jews as doubly removed and doubly alienated from mainstream and marginal society, and thus undeserving. What I am interested in is what separated the Jews from the rest of British society and how this factor in the perception of the Jews undermined the entire liberal call for inclusion.

The inclusion of the Jews in the call for equality was conditioned on a strategic limitation, which comes across in the question of fidelity. In Burke's *Reflections* we see a deliberate blurring between family, land, country, loyalty and religion, which raised the question whether Jews can become loyal subjects. The blurring lines between citizenship, loyalty and religion is not exclusive to the conservative ideal of Englishness but can also be traced in the liberal writings examined in this article. Though the liberals promised a new equal culture, their ideals were cemented in the existing religious-national foundation of Britain as a Christian-Protestant nation. Thus, the liberal call, like the conservative ideal, espoused the inter-relationship between civil equality, loyalty and religion. In this respect one can see that the idea of equality and citizenship, the declaration of loyalty to a given nation, indirectly voiced the need of conversion, figuratively if

not literally. Some, like Joseph Priestley, openly asked for the religious conversion of the Jews, whereas others expected a cultural assimilation, where the Jews clearly adopted the Christian values, morality and education of the British nation. Obviously, these expectations presented several limitations and the Jews, whose religious practices denied the truth of Christianity and shunned Jesus as the son of God, were considered suspect. The fear concerning the Jews' loyalty resulted in an ideological split in the liberal discourse between Christian and non-Christian (i.e. Jews) minorities in Britain. As we shall see, the Jew due to his 'new' social position as the doubly other, a minority within the Christian minority in Britain, was excluded from the liberal call for equality.

What we find, when focusing on late eighteenth century discourse, when the call for liberty and equality was resonating throughout the country, is that the word 'Jew' was stripped of any actual meaning and was rather used as a concept or social idiom. As I will show, the Jew in the political discourse between Burke and his political rivals was presented as part of the social reality of Britain. However, the Jews presence in the land was subjected to a political interpretation which loaded the Jews' presence with clear political and social signifiers, which excluded them from the entire social fabric. Even though these markers were devoid of real meaning, they did provide a syntax that defined the Jew as the doubly other and thus socially undesirable. The word 'Jew' as a socio-political construct became a field of political meanings, dictated by the speaker and writer, which justified the politics of exclusion. In the liberal writings examined, the politics of exclusion are specifically applied to the Jews alone. In fact, liberal writers utilised the politics of Jewish exclusion as a political strategy to justify the politics of inclusion of the other Christian minorities in Britain (Methodists, Dissenters, Catholics, etc.).

In what follows, I aim to show these liberal limitations with regards to the Jewish question by closely examining Burke's *Reflections* and the concept in

conservative thought concerning Jewish degeneracy and Jewish fidelity. The purpose of this examination is not to re-examine the ways Burke perceives the Jews, but rather to show the ways the word 'Jew' is used in the text as a conceptual instrument to attack liberal ideas and progress. The remaining argument focuses on the liberal writers Burke so vehemently criticises and their approach to the Jewish question. Through close analytical examination, I wish to point out the fact that liberal writers, regardless of their objection to Burke's conservatism, rooted their ambiguous approach towards Jews in the same concepts and traditional thinking that characterises their conservative opponents. As we shall see, liberal writers employed the same Jewish stereotypes as Burke. The question I wish to explore is what were the political and ideological factors that contributed to the dehumanization and exclusion of the Jew from the liberal call?

When Edmund Burke published his *Reflections* in 1790 he included references to the abominable character of the Jew. Characteristic of the period, Burke believed the Jew to be an economic and religious threat to English society. He saw the Jews as a menace on account of their financial dealings and economic power, emphasising the Jews 'civil crimes', their coining and usury as the reason for their banishment. Much has already been written about Burke's rendering of the Jew and it is not my intention to reiterate existing scholarship. It would suffice to say that Burke opposed the Jews for reasons of religion and ultra-patriotism. Burke sees the Jews as the reason for the destruction of rural Britain, resorting in his discussions about Jews to anti-Semitism amalgamated with anti-modern, anti-capitalist radicalism. Burke's rhetoric of anti-Semitism is rooted in a conservative discourse, which defined the British nation in terms of its religious foundation. For Burke, England is a Protestant-Anglican nation and under this parameter of national characterization, the Jew had no place. As W. D. Rubinstein points out, 'while in the eighteenth century no one in England advocated the persecution of

Jews...the presence in England of Jews—as well as Protestant Dissenters and, above all, Roman Catholics—was widely begrudged as the presence of a group which manifestly formed no part of this national English consensual matrix of governance’ (1996, 49). For Burke, Jews and everything the epithet denotes (money, commerce, etc.) were undermining the nation’s identity, breaking down the system and corrupting the old values that defined Englishmen and women.

Both in France and England, Burke discovers Jewish sympathisers, who with their appeal for religious toleration threaten to undermine the old Christian values of Britain and its church-state allegiance. Burke ridicules the resolution in France to emancipate the Jews, sneering at their ‘new Hebrew brethren’ (1790, 125). Though he does not make a direct connection between the Jews and the French, both are perceived as a threat to Britain.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on the events in France, Burke contends that the elimination of Britain’s national identity will be the cost Britain will have to pay for the price of liberality. The country will not only lose its monarchy, its justice system and tribunal, its ‘ancient corporations of the kingdom’, but it will become a country whose religious ground is dominated by Jews (Burke 1790, 80). For Burke, Jewish influence is inextricably associated with moneyed-interest. He sees the continual transformation of land to paper as threatening to subvert the principals of national heritage. Burke argues that ‘the

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<sup>4</sup> In *Reflections*, Burke argues that the men of previous revolutions were concerned with the wellbeing of the people rather than the advancement of individual interests. To emphasise his point, Burke comments that these men of honour ‘were not like Jew brokers, contending with each other who could best remedy with fraudulent circulation and depreciated paper the wretchedness and ruin brought on their country by their degenerate councils’ (1790, 70). It is the selfishness of the revolutionaries in France which ties them, in Burke’s mind, with the Jewish spirit of calculation and greed. Burke sees the Revolution in France as the direct result of what happens when ‘men of rank sacrifice all ideas of dignity to an ambition without a distinct object, and work with low instruments and for low ends’ (1790, 70). Though he does not say it directly, the French act like Jews; in fact he sees them as transformed into Jews. Once condemning the Revolution in France, Burke refers to the Great Revolution of 1688 as an example of a justified revolution conducted by the people and for the people. The men of 1688 were men of ambition and dignity, who had the commonwealth of the people at heart and for that ‘were not Jew’ and by reference were not French.

spirit of money-jobbing and speculation goes into the mass of land itself' and 'by this kind of operation, the species of property become (as it were) volatilized', assuming 'an unnatural and monstrous activity' (1790, 277). The changing of the country's constitution, the privatisation of land, according to Burke, will eventually lead to churchyards being sold to Jews, as evident in France, consequently undermining the conservative Burkean ideal of inheritance, rooted in the fixity of property (Burke 1790, 80).<sup>5</sup>

Though Burke chooses to target the Jews, his language of anti-Semitism in *Reflections* is not set against the Jews *per se*, but rather encapsulates his negation of modernity and liberality. *Reflections* is Burke's public response to the liberal voices that celebrated the French Revolution, specifically to a sermon delivered by Richard Price (4 November 1789) at the Dissenting meetinghouse of the Old Jewry. Burke saw liberalism as corroding tradition, disturbing existing orders and undermining foundations. He feared that the levelling principles overtaking Britain would submerge the nation with aliens, which would eventually drive out and consume the British nation. Frans De Bruyn writes that for Burke 'the active agent of this alleged cultural decay is the deracinated and free-thinking Jew' (2001, 578). The Jew in Burke's *Reflections* functions as a symbol for the liberal forces which threaten to undermine Englishness. For this reason, Burke merges 'Price, Gordon, and French speculators—Dissenting men of letters and Jewish stock-jobbers—all...into one enemy' (Manly 2000, 157). This is mostly apparent when Burke uses the location of Price's sermon, the Old Jewry house, to counter the liberal principles preached at that assembly. The fact that Price chose to deliver his speech at the Old Jewry is enough for Burke to tie liberal thought with the infectious ideas of Jewishness. For Burke, the place-name contaminates and

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<sup>5</sup> Burke feared that the 'the next generation of the nobility...will resemble the artificers and clowns, and money-jobbers, usurers, and Jews, who will be always their fellows, sometimes their masters' (1790, 72). For Burke, levelling and liberality held the dreaded potential of transforming Englishmen into Jews.

marks the speaker, the sermon and its content, the listeners and the entire liberal discourse. Accordingly, Price becomes 'the preacher of the Old Jewry' (Burke 1790, 98), his sermon is the 'sermon of the Old Jewry' (Burke 1790, 96), his liberal society is 'the society of the Old Jewry' (Burke 1790, 126), and Price's liberal doctrine is renamed as 'the Old Jewry doctrine' (Burke 1790, 26). In this respect, the words 'Jew' and 'Jewry', in Burke's text, become a synonym for liberality and revolution and link Price's 'Old Jewry doctrine' with notions of social upheaval, plots, massacres, assassinations and a complete elimination of Britain as a nation.

Burke rejects Price's doctrine as it might force a change on the British constitution, which his conservatism refuses to accommodate. Burke thus wishes to render Price's progressive thinking as alien and unpatriotic, which is why he deploys the idea of the Jew and Jewish invasion. Burke employs the appellation 'Jew' to manipulate buried anxieties and long-lasting traditions of hatred and mistrust. Though no doubt Burke's rhetoric reflects a personal prejudice against Jews, his deployment of the language of anti-Semitism is deliberate and structured to validate his political conservatism. Burke takes the popular stereotype of the Jew, with all its negative associations, for granted and simply links it with liberal thought, in the hope that the reader will associate progress with Jews and ultimately choose to repel the first as he does the latter. Consequently, it is not surprising to find the shadow of Shylock in Burke's rendering of the Jew as greedy, vengeful, stubborn, disloyal, unpatriotic, inassimilable and hence a viable threat to Britain as a nation. The problem lies in Burke's perception of Jews as an undifferentiated community of moneylenders and bankers, lacking any social or economic diversity. The word 'Jew' in *Reflections* does not refer to a real living human-being, but simply to a literary and cultural stereotype, which lacks any social or historical specificity. Predictably, conservative polemics encouraged anti-racial sentiments and racial stereotyping in its response to the liberal

sentiments spreading throughout the nation. As H. L. Malchow argues, the French wars, the attempted rebellion in Ireland and the spread of liberal ideals promoted after the French Revolution only served to heighten xenophobia and ‘validate ethnic prejudice as patriotic anti-Jacobinism’ (1996, 12). It is worth noting that Thomas W. Perry, in his analysis of the clamour ensuing after the Jew Bill of 1753, also associates verbal violence against Jews with ‘unrestraint political partisanship rather than anti-Jewish hysteria’ (1962, 194). Perry’s argument, however, must be correlated with that of Todd M. Endelman, who argues that anti-Jewish clamour ‘may have been precipitated for short-term political gains, but the feelings it allowed to surface and on which it played were hardly contrived for the occasion...The very fact that the opposition saw there were political advantages to be gained by exploiting the latent religious anti-Semitism of the population is a testimony to the real existence of those feelings’ (1999, 90-1). Endelman’s statement rings true not only with regards to the ‘opposition’, but also when one considers those who supported the liberal call. By looking at the function of the Jew in the writings of Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, Thomas Paine and William Godwin, this article suggests that for these liberals, as for Burke, the Jew was simply the ultimate inassimilable other and thus lied outside their call for equality. As I will argue, the irony of Burke’s deployment of the ‘Jew’ to support his political ideology is that similar tendencies can be found in the liberal voices he attacks and associates with Jewishness.

The eighteenth century was indeed a time in which toleration and equality were continually advocated and more so after the American (1775-83) and French (1790) revolutions. It is around this time that Price, Priestley, Paine and Godwin published their liberal doctrines to support the call for equality and advocate a multi-cultural, multi-religious society. Some of their publications were indeed a response to Burke’s conservative treatise, whereas *Reflections* itself was published to voice Burke’s opposition to the progressive ideas introduced by the likes of

Price and his peers. The points of departure between Burke and his political rivals are well known and have been fully investigated and there is no need to restate them here. However, even though there is an obvious ideological demarcation between Burke and his opponents, there is a clear point of convergence in their treatment of the Jew. To one extent or another, the Jew features both in Burke's *Reflections* and in the writings of his liberal counterparts. However, just because writers chose to refer to the Jews or incorporate the Jew in their argument, does not necessarily mean their writings support the call for tolerance towards Jews or showcase a clear evidence of prejudice. Even though some of the writers I discuss advocate tolerance towards Jews, a call which as we shall see is in itself problematic, the Jewish question did not occupy a central position in the conservative-liberal debate. Like in Burke's *Reflections*, the Jew in the liberal discourse is deployed simply as a device to voice and advance a political agenda. In his study, Bryan Cheyette argues that 'the multitude of arbitrary guises 'the Jew' assumes...means that he or she is not conceived of as a static 'myth' but is, instead, irrevocably shaped by the gender, aesthetics, and politics of a given writer' (1996, 3). Indeed, as will become evident in the following argument, the word 'Jew' in either conservative or liberal writings is employed as an abstraction of the Jews as a group. As we shall see, the term 'Jew' lends itself to a variety of interpretations due to the stereotypical association with Jews and their social condition as a stateless nation, religious-national-culturally different. In the hands of the writers discussed, the multiple readings of the word allow the manipulation and construction of 'the Jew' for ideological and political purposes in the endeavour to shape the identity of the English nation.

With the emergence of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on secular thought and rationality, the religious argument against the Jews as the purported killers of Christ weakened, though admittedly it was not entirely eliminated. This tendency only increased towards the end of the eighteenth century as more

intellectuals argued towards religious toleration, liberality and a separation between church and state (Felsenstein 1995, 25-26). The end of the eighteenth century was characterised by the ascendancy of the Whigs with their liberal policy, countering the Tories' exclusionist one. Along with the call for toleration, however, there was a clear tendency to strengthen nationalist sentiments. Mostly due to the war efforts against Catholic France, the French Revolution and the expanding regions of the empire, Britain endeavoured to maintain its connection to the church and cement Protestantism as a national signifier. Hence while on the one hand the country was assimilating different ethnic groups into the nation, on the other hand it was forming a Protestant national identity to retain the nation's Englishness (Colley 1992, 231; Spector 2002, 2). In her study of early nineteenth-century literature and the Jewish question, Shelia A. Spector maintains that the tensions forming between the ideals of liberality and Protestant nationalism were mediated in the form of what she terms 'Romantic reformation': a reconfiguration of the 'the theological basis of Anglicanism...to accommodate a Protestant identity with the core values of liberty and freedom' (2002, 5). This form of reconfiguration and reformation, with its emphasis on liberal values, embeds within the acknowledgment of difference and also its expulsion. The definition of Britain as a Protestant nation is one of separation and differentiation from other cultural and religious groups, expunging those who fail to embrace its unifying principal—Protestantism. Accordingly, the process of reconciliation between liberalism and nationalism was both of integration and separation. Indeed, what becomes apparent when one examines Burke's references to Jews alongside those made by the liberal voices he so keenly criticises in *Reflections* is that even though liberal writers embraced the basic ideals of liberality, their writings are ingrained with an unresolvable prejudice against the religious other. In many ways, the idea of liberalism seems to assume the same exclusionist tone traced in Burke's conservative treatise. Accordingly, by exploring the idea of the 'Jew' in

the writings of Price, Priestley, Paine and Godwin, it transpires that these champions of liberality held the same xenophobic and negative perceptions of the Jew as their conservative counterpart simply to advance their political partisanship.

Most prominently, Burke's sentiments regarding Jews were shared by his political rival Richard Price, whom he ridicules in his *Reflections*. Price, though a professed Christian, believed religious liberty to be the crown of England's national advantage. Price's thought and advocacy of toleration were heavily influenced by the problems facing the Dissenters in the eighteenth century. Like the Jews, the Dissenters were a religious minority, struggling to obtain full legal recognition from the state for their right to worship God as they deemed fit. They could not take the sacrament according to the Anglican Church and were debarred from holding an office under the Crown, they could not matriculate at Oxford and though they were admitted to Cambridge they were unable to take a degree there. In their efforts to remove these disabilities, the leaders of the Dissenters strove to advocate the belief in religious freedom. They denied the state's right to interfere in religious matters and defended the right for religious liberty. The Dissenters' support of political secularisation is evident in Price's pamphlets, *Britain's Happiness and the Proper Improvement of It* (1759) and his *Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789). But Price's support of the secularisation of politics was presented within a context in which God's role in redressing the suffering and injustices of life is paramount. Price's political belief did not come to negate or diminish the power of religion, but rather that of the state.

Though Price's *Discourse* undermines the traditional order in Britain to promote the right of religious freedom, it is nonetheless a celebration of patriotism—an extolment of Britain's Protestantism. Protestantism, in Price's doctrine, is the symbol and the fundamental value of Britain as a nation of liberty and equality (1991, 12). Accordingly, it is not surprising that though Price is keen

on promoting religious liberties and toleration, he is quick to condemn Catholicism, referring to the ‘dangers of Popery and arbitrary power’ (1991, 178). When warning against the desires of dominion and private interest, Price, like Burke, employs the Jews as an example of the vice. Price describes how the ancient Jews promoted their own interest and ignored other groups or nations, thus subtly referring to the stereotypical accusation that Jews exist as a nation within a nation. He further refers to the Indians, the Arabs and the Jews as nothing other than a ‘band of robbers in their attempt to crush all liberty but their own’ (Price 1991, 179). Price’s attitudes towards Jews and other religious minorities can be explained by the constant need at the turn of the century to define Englishness. The efforts to differentiate Protestantism from other religions or cultures are cemented in the need towards the turn of the century to separate Britain from its neighbouring shores (Colley 1992, 5). Peter Sahlin has written that national identity ‘like ethnic or communal identity is contingent and relational: it is defined by the social or territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and its implicit negation, the other’ (quoted in Colley 1992, 5-6). For that purpose, Price not only differentiates Christianity from Judaism but he does so in order to demonstrate that the new religion is superior in importance and even in cosmic ways.

Price sees in Protestantism a higher principle of universal benevolence and brotherly love, which transcends the desire of private interest. Tom Furniss remarks that since for Price ‘virtue is the origin and sign of a nation’s liberty, internal corruption and luxury is perhaps the greatest threat of all’ (2000, 118). To warn against the desire of private interest overcoming the principle of universal benevolence, Price turns to the Jews: ‘What was the love of their country among the Jews, but a wretched partiality to themselves, and a proud contempt of all other nations?’ (1991, 179). Price presents the Jews as a negative example to avoid, deploying yet again the stereotype of the Jews existing as a nation within a

nation and exclusively devoted to their selfish interests. By exorcizing the internal threat of corruption and channelling it into the other and thus outside the social, Price sets a comparative paradigm between the other and the native in which the native has moral superiority. Price shares with Burke the assumption that the collective wellbeing of nations is dependent on the virtue of its inhabitants (Furniss 2000, 125). 'The claim for moral virtue,' Furniss writes, 'is characteristic of almost all nationalist movements. Nationalists tend to represent their programme as a moral crusade devoted to re-establishing native virtues and to resisting the moral corruption of foreign nations or of 'alien' elements within the nation state' (Furniss 2000, 125). Price, like Burke, aims to expunge from within the elements which he perceives as harmful to the nation and to national identity. Like his political opponent, he manipulates the stereotype of the Jew as socially alienated and money orientated to reinforce his Christian vision of Britain and define its social and national boundaries. Though Price advocates toleration, he does so under a banner of nationalism that extols the Christian religion that defines Britain, and differentiates it from its neighbours. Though he does not attack Judaism or denies the need for a general emancipation in Britain of religious minorities, Price does belittle the ancient Hebrews and portrays their religious beliefs as false or misdirected. On the one hand, Price advocates liberty and toleration, whilst on the other he shuns the Arabs, Jews and Indians for failing to embrace Christianity and its universal principles of love.

Price's call for religious liberty and toleration, as well as his references to Christian nationalism, can also be traced in the writings of his friend and associate, Joseph Priestley. Both writers were influenced by John Locke in their argument for a wider toleration that included Jews and also in their perception of Christianity as a superior religion to Judaism (Marshall 2006, 604). The sense of religious superiority emerges in Priestley's *Letters to the Jews* (1787), in which he tries to persuade the Jews' of England to convert to Christianity. Priestley opens

his argument with the acknowledgement that the Jews are indeed the chosen people, and continues with the assertion that their dislike of Christians is not to be wondered at, considering the years of persecutions they suffered under their hands. However, Priestley dismisses the Jews' on-going animosity towards Christians, arguing that cruelty towards Jews in Britain is not only abated but supplanted with a disposition towards equity and humanity. Priestley was not alone in believing the conditions of the Jews in Britain dramatically changed for the better. As Don Herzog comments, many writers and commentators around this time congratulated themselves on their humanity and toleration of Jews (1998, 304). Though 'the legal condition of Jews in England has not altered', remarks one writer in *The Monthly Magazine*, 'the people no longer view them with rancor, or mistrust, or unbrotherly emotions' (Anon 1796, 200). Another recalls that whereas 'it was customary among the lowest classes of the populace to hunt the Jews and shamefully maltreat them...these vicious practices are now hardly witnessed' (Smith 1815, 20). Though these self-congratulatory sentiments fail under scrutiny, it is under this pretext of liberality that Priestley asks the Jews to forget past mistreatments and open their minds to the Christian doctrine. He presents his argument for conversion by establishing that Christianity emerged from Judaism and that both religions share a basic yet fundamental truth. He draws on parallels between Moses and Christ and refers to the fact that Christians, like Jews, believe in the Law of Moses and accept Moses as a true prophet of God. Priestley does not fail to mention that the first followers of Christ and the first converts to his doctrine were Jews themselves, who saw the truth inherited in the new doctrine of the Son of God. This shared belief in Moses and the acknowledgement that Christianity sprung from the foundations of Judaism is what Priestley hopes will make Jews realise that Christianity is the logical succession to Judaism and not apart from it.

Priestley's efforts to pacify the Jews are not devoid of what can only be seen as a subtle threat to their well-being. Priestley concludes his work by arguing that if the Jews would fail to acknowledge Christ as the messenger of God and his miracles as God's doings, it would not be surprising that any person, meaning a Christian, would be justified in rejecting the Truth of their religion (1787, 56). Priestley, though complementary in his efforts to persuade the Jews, does not shy from employing traditional stereotypes of Jews to explain their stubborn reluctance to accept the new religion. He characterises the Jews' behaviour and lack of faith in Christ, in the time of the apostles, as obstinate, which he attributes to their 'nature' and motives of 'interest, ambition and revenge' (Priestley 1787, 27). For him, the only way a Jew can forsake his selfish and obstinate disposition is by embracing Jesus as a true messiah and converting to his doctrine. What is implied in Priestley's statement is a silent warning to the Jews: that if they wish to be socially accepted, they in turn must acknowledge they are part of England—Protestant England. Priestley's call for conversion denies Jewish specificity and demands the elimination of difference. The proclamation that Jews would be better off resembling their non-Jewish compatriots holds within the notion that Jews exist as a nation within a nation. Priestley's rejection of this is symptomatic of a political philosophy that aspires for the uniformity of the masses. Priestley's insinuation is a subtle formulation of the Jew as a voluntary stranger in a Christian nation, with no claim to equality unless converted. A more virulent version of this appears years later in William Cobbett's 'Good Friday', where Cobbett affirms that England is a Christian nation and the scripture proved that the Jews 'should, in no country on earth [as long as they adhere to their blasphemy], have any immunities, any privileges,...any civil or political rights; that they should, everywhere, be deemed aliens' (1846, 234). As Priestley hints and Cobbett affirms, conversion is the only path available to English assimilation. Both these statements affirm Michael Ragussis' conclusion in his study, *Figures of*

*Conversion*, of the inevitable belief in English thought that ‘Jewish identity and English national identity were mutually exclusive’ (1995, 23). Conversion serves both writers as a way to overcome this difference as the idea of conversion holds within the means to regulate, construct and erase religious-cultural-racial differences.

The discrepancies in Price and Priestley’s doctrines of toleration can be attributed to their main political ambition to grant social and political equality to the Dissenting group in Britain. The disarray following the French Revolution and its promise of equality, freedom and liberty inspired and presented the Dissenters with the opportunity to demand for themselves similar parliamentary and social rights offered under the new French establishment. Like the Jews and Roman Catholics, the Dissenters were a minority group in England, which under the Toleration Act of 1689 suffered several forms of social disabilities. Accordingly, Price and Priestley employed the Jewish example in their struggle for emancipating the Dissenters, as they saw parallels between their status and that of the Jews. However, their doctrine of toleration was itself embedded in Christianity, and thus religiously limited. For Priestley, as Susan Manly argues, the conversion of the Jews was a positive stage ‘towards the ultimate goal of (protestant Christian) liberty of conscience’, and thus a formative step towards a Protestant nation (2001, 73). Religious belief was integral to both Price and Priestley’s political theories. On the one hand, both writers aimed to repeal the political injustices and social disabilities experienced by Dissenters by arguing for a universal measure of tolerance and liberality, which included Jews. On the other hand, their lexis of intolerance towards Jews can be seen as their attempt to distance Dissenters from Jews and their betrayal of Christ. Enshrouding their work in Christian morality, both writers silently resorted to a line of argument which proclaimed that Dissenters unlike Jews are Christian believers, devout followers of Christ, and should be accepted as equal Britons. Here, as in Burke’s

*Reflections*, the epithet 'Jew' is embedded in a political ideology of exclusion, fundamental to the preservation of Protestant Britain. Hence, though Price and Priestley aimed towards religious freedom, they shared Burke's conservative outlook which perceived Protestant Christianity as the national definer of Britain.

Whereas Price and Priestley resorted to the debasement of the chosen people as proof of the truth of Christianity, others employed a similar line of attack to present their arguments against traditional beliefs. The Enlightenment's emphasis on rationalism led to the development of secular thought and many of its intellectuals rejected the Jews for their unwillingness to discard those practices and customs that kept them as a distinct group. Many of the intellectuals around this time held negative opinions about Jews and Judaism, emerging mostly from their scepticism about revelation and God as the Supreme Being. The main phalanx of deists, who denounced the incoherence of the revealed doctrine, saw Judaism and the Jews as the reason for the besmirched Christian tradition. They perceived Judaism as the defining character of modern Christianity, arguing that the corrupted nature of the Israelite prophets and priests are now seen in the clergy, and Hebraic barbarity is now inbred in Christian institutions and governmental policies. Deism attacked not only the revelation of Christ but also that of Moses. What followed was that many writers drew unflattering images of the Old Testament Jews, accusing them of intolerance, immorality and greed. The Jews of the Old Testament were denounced for massacring their enemies, for their materialism, for cannibalism and bestiality. Matthew Tindal, for example, in *Christianity as Old as Creation* (1730), calls the spirit of the Old Testament 'a spirit of cruelty' (1978, 268). Tindal dwells on how Jacob cheated his older brother, how Rahab betrayed her country, how David cursed his enemies, the brutality in which the Israelites eliminated the Canaanites, and how Saul destroyed the Amalekites and killed 'women, infants and suckling' under God's command (1978, 263). Thomas Morgan as well, in *A Brief Examination of the*

*Rev. Mr. Warburtons' Divine Legation of Moses* (1742), sees the God of the Old Testament as a 'God of War' (1742, 19). In the preface to his translation of the Holy Bible (1792 and 1797), Alexander Geddes, like Thomas Paine in the *Age of Reason*, asserts that the five books of Moses are simply a record of Hebrew mythology and the work of Hebrew historiographers rather than the divine word of God (1792. xi).

In Paine's *Age of Reason*, Jewish history is described as exclusive, xenophobic, superstitious and lacking any culture. Paine defames Judaism as a narrowly practical and egotistical religion. His underlying aim was to undermine the foundations of Christianity by undermining its older Judaic foundations. Paine, a deist, rejected Christianity as for him the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus and the notion of the Trinity, were unreasonable and as such unworthy of critical inspection. In his attempts to refute Christianity, Paine disproves the divine origin of Judaism by reciting the shortcomings and inconsistencies he finds in the Old Testament itself. Under Paine's sceptical eyes, the narrative of the Old Testament is redefined in secular terms and rendered as the history of a brutal and savage people. In the *Age of Reason*, the Hebrew God is deemed cruel, merciless and bloodthirsty. The entire section regarding the Israelites renders the cruelty of religious people and portrays biblical Jews as contemptible. Paine's attack on the Jewish race begins with Moses, whom he deems a murderer, and continues with the claim that the Jews are addicted to 'cruelty and revenge' and that their aim in conquest was simply murder and greed (2003, 177. quote 115). Paine, like his contemporaries, accuses the Jews of being superstitious, insufficiently rational, and persistently primitive, whilst simultaneously advocating for freedom of conscience, liberality and social equality. The contradiction results from the fact that the Jews were a constant reminder of the religious world Paine rejected. They were the people, stubborn in their faith, who failed to conform to the Enlightenment's principles of rationality.

Paine's biblical criticism and denunciation of Jews can be seen as identical to anti-Semitism, though it can also be argued that his critique does not constitute anti-Semitism, but simply criticism. Others might claim that Paine's criticism was not aimed at Jews but rather served a strategic purpose of defaming the Church. Be that as it may, Paine's references to the ancient Jews as greedy, murderous robbers do seem to emerge from latent anti-Semitism. Paine's anti-Semitic attitudes can be traced in his *Rights of Man* (1791) where he refers to the Jews and aristocrats as inbred degenerates (1997, 100). Paine's statement is in part an expression of his rejection of monarchy and aristocratic government. He wishes the readers to associate the aristocracy with Jewish criminality and immorality to delegitimize its socio-political power. This simple association between Jews and aristocracy plays on the readers' prejudice of Jews as a nation of crafty extortionists and oppressors, the enemies of popular rights and liberties. Paine's racist implication, invoking the stereotypical perception of Jews as socially alienated and corrupt, is addressed in the anonymous response made against Paine's *Rights of Man*. The author argues that the purpose of Paine's statement is to 'inflamm the minds of the people with hatred and aversion to their present constitution' (Anon 1791, 41). The author charges Paine for employing the ingrained prejudice against Jews to render his image of the aristocrats and to invoke in his readers the same sentiments of resentment and distrust they have towards Jews. The author's conservative comeback asserts that not only did the Jews maintain their moral qualities at the time of Moses, but also in their present time when faced with social and political disadvantages worldwide. By establishing the morality of the Jewish race, the author's main purpose is to establish the rightful place of the aristocracy and the British government to govern the masses. The writer is not outraged at Paine's prejudiced insinuation regarding Jews, but rather sets out to disprove Paine's assessment of the aristocracy. Here,

as in Paine's work, the word 'Jew' is not used to address the Jewish question, but is rather indicative of political partisanship.

Paine, along with Richard Price and William Godwin, believed in the mind's objective access to see things as they are, 'without regard to place or person' (1997, 222). Price as well in his *Discourse* declares that 'a wise man...will study to think all things as they are, and not suffer any partial affection to blind his understanding' (1991, 178). Godwin's entire idealism in *Political Justice* is based on the fundamental belief in the mind's rational access to absolute truth and to its power to see things as they are. However Godwin, in his 1785 essay 'The Grounds of Constitutional Opposition Stated', had already detected a problem with this approach to truth, admitting that 'people will never be able to see objects as they are. You must either permit them to amplify them into the gigantic and the marvellous, or you may be morally assured they will degrade them into objects of derision and abhorrence' (1993, Vol. 5, 237). Godwin's statement raises the fundamental problem with the philosophy he presents a few years later in *Political Justice* (1793). The passage clearly proclaims the mind's power of distortion and the problems relating to human perception. The image in the perceived mind can never be the Truth as it is tainted by the mind's imperfect lens of perception and thus undermines the mind's access to things as they are.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the effort to present things as they are fails when one considers Price, Paine and even Godwin's inability to view Jews without bias, or offer a perception untainted by years of prejudice.

Though Godwin rejects the 'most unheard of barbarities, and...unrelenting persecution' of Jews, he admits that these persecutions result from the Jews' murder of Christ and their so called 'peculiarities': 'The peculiarities of this race of men, their singular diet and customs, and their striking physiognomy, kept alive

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<sup>6</sup> In the revisions Godwin made for the second edition of *Political Justice* he remarks that 'we cannot penetrate into the essences of things, or rather we have no sound and satisfactory knowledge of things external to ourselves' (1993, Vol. 4, 44).

the hatred, and aided the proscription' (Godwin 1828, Vol. 4, 243). Godwin's statement seems to espouse the idea that the Jews brought hatred and persecution on themselves through their appearance and behaviour. Though in his *History of the Commonwealth of England*, Godwin perceives the Jews' re-admission to England as beneficial to English commerce (1824, Vol. 4, 245), in *Political Justice* he refers to the Jews as 'universally distinguished...for extortion' (1993, Vol. 3, 39). Following Jewish stereotypes, in Godwin's *Mandeville* (1817), the Jew is introduced simply as another street vender targeting men and maidens with his 'multiplicity of temptations' (1817, Vol. 1, 140). Though nothing much is said about the Jew's appearance, he is used as a sort of comic relief for the main character, who finds the Jew's jargon and 'uncouth accent' a subject of curiosity and amusement (Godwin 1817, Vol. 1, 140-41). The focus on the Jew's peculiar accent in *Mandeville*, as in Godwin's other novels, confirms the Jew's status as an alien presence in England. The reference to the Jews' social marginality and even invisibility can also be found in Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), where the Jew is employed merely to reflect the protagonist's ordeal. The novel tells the story of Caleb, who hears the confession of Falkland, his master, to the murder of another squire. With the discovery of his master's guilt, Caleb is forced into a nightmarish world of flight and pursuit as he is hounded across the country by Falkland. In his flight from Falkland, Caleb adopts various disguises as a robber, an Irish beggar and a Jew, signifying his worsening social position. Caleb's transformation to a Jew signals his absolute social alienation. As a robber or an Irish beggar, Caleb though now on the margins is still part of the social, he still fears detection and is continuously probed under the watchful eyes of his countrymen. It is the disguise of the Jew which completely removes Caleb from social consciousness. As a Jew, Caleb becomes socially indiscernible—an outcast and doubly alienated—as Caleb is indeed perceived by the authorities. Like the stereotypical perception of Jews as

a nation within a nation, Caleb is presented as part of, yet separate from, society, inassimilable and perpetually alienated.

Caleb's transformation to a Jew, to a 'Jew-Christian', though highlights the protagonist's predicament, also serves to render Godwin's nationalist sentiments. The inter-cultural fusion of Jewishness and Protestant-Englishness is not welcomed by Caleb, who asserts that 'no things could be more dissimilar' (Godwin 2009, 253), or by Godwin himself. According to Charlie Bondhus, Godwin does not employ the example of the Jew-Christian to show the similarities between the two cultures, but to underscore the discrepancy and degeneracy of a Christian nation under corruption. As Bondhus argues, the plot of Caleb turning into a Jew is used by Godwin to link oppression with Jewishness, the latter being the ultimate result of a corrupted government (2010, 185). It is the consequences of oppression that force Caleb to don the clothing of a Jew, emphasising the emerging state of up-rootedness and statelessness following the power of despotism. If Burke feared the revolution will turn Britons into Jews, Godwin feared that the current state of government will turn Englishmen into Jews. The novel presents Godwin's fears that the cultural and moral corruption of English aristocrats, by foreign influences, would eventually seep into mainstream middle-lower society and corrode national manners, which subsequently would corrupt and degenerate Englishness (Bondhus 2010, 170).

Falkland's fascination with Italian culture, his gallantry and obsession with honour, result in the undermining of his Englishness. By acting as an imagined Italian aristocrat, Falkland not only abandons his English identity and the values of liberty and morality Godwin associates with it, but also undermines the entire Anglo-social fabric, appearing in the text in the guise of Caleb. It is Falkland's sense of honour which leads to his persecution of Caleb, who as a result is forced to forsake his English identity and adopt that of an Irish beggar and of a Jew. Godwin's purpose, according to Bondhus, is to highlight how the 'continually

inflected malfeasance of the aristocracy corrupts the middle class' and destabilises Englishness (2010, 165). By adopting the foreign values of Italian culture and importing them into England, Falkland forces Caleb (his subordinate) to erase his own sense of identity as an Englishman and adopt that of an alien outsider. Thus, what was once an Englishman now transforms into an Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Jewish identity, a transformation Godwin perceives as a threat to English national 'purity'. As Bondhus argues, 'Godwin...with the ostensible intention of promoting a liberal model of human rights, attempts to meet his aim by deploying stereotypical perceptions of Italians, Jews and the Irish' (Bondhus 2010, 167). In doing so, Godwin intends to highlight 'how the aristocracy's and the government's disregard for the rights of the common people is symptomized by the discursive denationalization of those in authority, which in turn leads to the discursive denationalization of citizens' (Bondhus 2010, 167). When Caleb disguises himself as a Catholic (Irish) or a Jew, he refers to his transformation as a contemptuous act and a 'miserable expedient' (Godwin 2009, 230) not only because he is forced to 'slum' with the 'dregs of mankind' (Godwin 2009, 226), but also because by doing so he ends up betraying his Anglo-Protestant heritage.

Consequently, Godwin, like his contemporaries, is not interested in the Jews as a real community in England, but as a narrative device to further his political purposes. The concentration on the Jew, in such terms, excludes the Jew as an individual, as having any social and historical significance. Godwin does not draw on the stereotype of the depraved Jew, yet his portrayal of Caleb's transformation falls in line with the common views regarding the Jews' physiognomy and speech. Caleb adopts the Jews' garb, dialect and even changes his complexion to give it 'the dun and sallow hue' which is 'characteristic of the tribe' (Godwin 2009, 246-7). One may claim that Godwin's liberality is evident in his attempt to break away from the stereotype of the illiterate, depraved Jew by allowing him a respectful profession as a writer. However, one can also suggest

that the emphasis placed on the highly stereotyped character of a Jew, with his physiognomy, dress and mannerism serves to confirm Jewish innate depravity and alienation from mainstream society. In a novel that speaks of false persecution and injustice, on misconception and prejudice, Godwin fails to directly address and explore the sufferings of those who are socially outcast. With regards to the Jews, both protagonist and author fail to dwell on the subject for too long, simply leaving the reader to draw on his/her own knowledge of the other to reach full comprehension. After adopting his Jewish disguise, Caleb remarks that ‘it is unnecessary to describe all the particulars of [his] new equipage’ (Godwin 2009, 246), thus relying on readers’ knowledge of Jews. This simple act of reticence, of reliance on past and present tales about Jews, basically legitimises and strengthens the already rooted prejudice regarding the Jews’ appearance, intellect and virtue. By drawing on already existing stereotypes, without any direct effort to uncover its falsity the novel and its author only reinforce the power of the imagination and the power of persecution against the unwanted other. Thus, though Godwin in *Caleb Williams* presents his argument for social reformation and liberality, these ideas are not extended towards Jews, or any minority group which resides outside the borders of Englishness.

Godwin’s avoidance of the Jewish question places the Jews outside his doctrine of tolerance and equality, indirectly legitimizing the Jews’ social status as aliens. By failing to address the Jews’ social disadvantages or the ungrounded prejudice against Jews, Godwin negates the social and historical significance of Jewish persecution. In Godwin’s *St. Leon* (1799), the narrator, once imprisoned by the Inquisition, asserts that ‘it is not [his] intension to treat of those particulars of the holy office which are already to be found in innumerable publications’ (1994, 310). As Ragussis points out, *St. Leon*, like many of the novels at the time dealing with the Inquisition fails to incorporate in it scenes of Jewish persecution (1995, 135). Rather than narrating the sufferings of Jews under Spanish rule, *St.*

*Leon* (like *Caleb Williams*) relies on readers' knowledge and the power of imagination. *St. Leon*, according to Ragussis, is typically part of English discourse at the time about the Inquisition, with its anti-Catholic tone and its failure to be pro-Jewish (1995, 135). Ragussis further comments that though *St. Leon* fails to address the history of Jewish suffering, Godwin does employ the mythological image of the wandering Jew (1994, 136). However, the wandering Jew is presented as neither a victim nor a historical figure. His image is employed as a narrative mechanism to inspire fear in the reader and as the reason for the protagonist's suffering. Though the wandering Jew appears as homeless, socially disconnected and alienated, this bears no reference to the Spanish banishment of Jews from its borders in 1492. Rather, as Ragussis argues, the Jew in *St. Leon* as in other Gothic novels remains 'on the margins of the different discourses that represented the Inquisition, a ghostly figure of fantasy rather than a flesh-and-blood figure of history, and hence shut out from English sympathies for the victims of Catholic intolerance' (1995, 136). Godwin's failure to address the Jewish question and his elevation of the wandering Jew to a universal position follows the pattern of what Galperin identifies as the ambivalence of Romantic writers. In his essay 'Romanticism and/or Antisemitism', Galperin remarks that the intentional democratic internationalist language of Romanticism 'with its special commitment to the significance and autonomy of individual human beings' refuses the historic position of anti-Semitism (1996, 18). Thus, even in the wave of optimism overtaking Britain after the French Revolution, radical thinkers like Godwin with their revolutionary idealism could only offer an ambiguous approach to racial equality, which among others excluded Jews. Godwin, as his contemporaries, tries to ameliorate the conditions of minorities in England, whilst ensuring this does not conflict with Britain's national identity as a Christian nation. Godwin draws heavily on his readers' patriotic sentiments and loyalty to the nation, emphasising Englishness over foreign influences. His doctrine of

toleration, like that of Priestley and Price, refuses those whose cultural history, language and religion are divorced from what Englishness entails.

The ambiguity traced in Godwin's doctrine towards the Jews confirms the contradictions and discrepancies in the liberal call after the French Revolution. It further confirms the multifaceted use of the figure of the Jew as an abstract idea, lacking any historical, cultural or national specificity. For the conservative the Jew was the dreaded sign of progression; for the liberal, Jews and Judaism were a symbol of a superstitious past; whereas for the likes of Godwin they were a symbolic threat to a cohesive national identity. Whether religious, cultural or political, the anti-foreign arguments of Burke, Price, Priestley, Paine and Godwin deployed the Jew because he embodied the doubly alien figure of both origin and religion. As we have seen, the Jew whether in the conservative or liberal discourse always assumes the face of the political rival, his abstract figure standing in for the political ideology of the opposition. It is the readers' familiarity with the myth of the deracinated Jew and their dislike of Shylock, which renders the Jew as undesirable and transforms him into a political instrument by both conservatives and liberals. It is through the association of the political opposition with the Jew that the writers of either political camp hoped to win the readers' sympathy and support for their political vision. The Jew is thus continuously reconstructed and reconfigured according to the politics of a given writer to represent the depraved unfamiliar, new and foreign forces that threaten to overtake the country and overthrow the 'native'. This tactic of representation not only sets the foreign and the new as unwelcomed additions but also sets and defines the social and national boundaries of what is considered to be British. Stemming from xenophobic and nationalistic sentiments, the liberal argument at the time, as the conservative, simply confirms the negative notions held against Jews, or even plants new seeds of suspicion. Considering the writings of Price and Priestley, it seems that those who defined Britain as a tolerant society placed the burden of assimilation on the

Jews. It was the Jews' responsibility to cease being Jewish in order to become English. What is evident in the call for assimilation is the resentment felt towards the Jews' refusal to abandon their religious-racial identity to become English-Protestants. Thus, although British liberalism at this time is seen as a tolerant voice protecting the marginalised minority, with regards to the Jews, it only reinforces popular prejudice and stereotypes of the greedy, stubborn, inassimilable Jew.

What seems to emerge from the writings examined in this article is that the liberal call extended its call for tolerance only towards the familiar other, towards those who shared a mutual foundation which strengthened the religious and national roots of Britain as a Christian nation. Those like the Jews who were deemed as the unfamiliar other, whose religious basis undermined and challenged the religious-national essence of the nation, were deliberately excluded from the liberals' politics of inclusion. The liberals believed the Jews to be a separatist group rather than part of the nation due to their religious difference. This perception fundamentally undermined the liberal call and its revolutionary ideal of equality to all. The Jews' adherence to their faith and customs hindered their entrance into the liberal argument. It is the Jews' so called stubbornness which marked them as suspect and as a threat to national solidarity. It is thus for these reasons that the political conceptualisation of the Jews in liberal writings was dependant on the strategic limitation in the liberal discourse.

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