The Wandering Jew in the Drawing Room: Harriett Abrams's Gothic Songbook of 1803

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Inclusion of an article on the English singer and composer Harriett Abrams (ca. 1758–1821) in a journal issue on music in Jewish history might seem like special pleading. It is true that Abrams was born into a Jewish family, and her Judaism constituted a sensational aspect of her youthful stage career, mounted under the auspices of the ever-opportunistic David Garrick. However, in 1791, Abrams and her sisters converted away from Judaism, being baptized and joining the Church of England.[1] The masterful study of Abrams's career by Berta Joncus and Vanessa L. Rogers suggests that, even by the 1770s, Abrams had cultivated an "on- and off-stage persona from which exoticism and all traces of Jewishness were absent"; by 1800, "associations between the Abrams [sisters] and Judaism seemed to disappear," and with their conversion, the Abrams sisters "could claim to be fully assimilated into the glittering society in which they moved."[2] Uri Erman contrasts Abrams's career with that of the Jewish tenor and cantor Michael Leoni, noting that, unlike Leoni, "Abrams largely evaded Jewish associations, even with her overtly Jewish surname."[3] In his book *Jewry in Music*, David Conway's interpretation is firmer still: "not a shred of evidence exists," he claims, "that [the Abrams sisters'] Jewish origins even entered the minds of any of their audience or contacts, except at Harriett's juvenile debut."[4]

Pace Conway, the absence of evidence cannot be taken as proof, one way or the other, about how either Abrams or her listeners perceived her Jewishness, and it seems reasonable to wonder whether the context of Abrams's life and career threw her Jewish ancestry into relief, even after her conversion.

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[1] Berta Joncus and Vanessa L. Rogers, "'United Voices Formed the Very Perfection of Harmony': Music and the Invention of Harriett Abrams," in *Celebrity: The Idiom of the Modern Era*, ed. Bärbel Czennia (New York: AMS Press, 2013), 92.

[2] Ibid., 79, 85, 92.

[3] Uri Erman, "The Operatic Voice of Leoni the Jew," *Journal of British Studies* (April 2017): 302, n. 32.

[4] David Conway, *Jewry in Music: Entry to the Profession from the Enlightenment to Richard Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 81.

While London at the turn of the nineteenth century offered a relatively tolerant and open society—one in which many Jews achieved some social prominence and financial success—it nevertheless harbored a degree of antisemitism that pervaded public consciousness, such that English Jews "still constituted a stigmatized minority whose legal status and social acceptance were often ambiguous."[5] A rise in millenarianism in the wake of the French Revolution had many Londoners convinced that the Second Coming was imminent, and this event would require Jews to accept Jesus as their savior. Thus, for some, Jews became a target of religious evangelism.[6] Antisemitic portrayals of Jews in the theater pitted Jewish audience members against their non-Jewish counterparts in very public ways, sometimes to the point of riots.[7] Moreover, Jews were increasingly associated with the poor and undesirable of society and were thus a target of hatred and the object of blame for society's ills.[8] Especially in the wake of the radical excesses of the French Revolution and the Terror, and even more at the onset of the Napoleonic Wars, English nationalist sentiment classified Jews as outsiders worthy of mistrust. Even if, as Erman has suggested, Jewish women were more easily accepted into English society than Jewish men, since "the Jewess was perceived as malleable and as subject to the possession of her viewer,"[9] Abrams's surname alone could easily have identified her with a people that was constantly seen as an "other."

A close reading of Abrams's songbook of 1803 raises additional questions about the composer's identification with Judaism. (The book bears no title page; if it ever had one, it was lost from both extant copies. Following Joncus and Rogers, I will refer to it simply as Abrams's *Songs*.) It is true that the *Songs* are technically unassuming, presenting little in the way of virtuosic difficulty that might challenge the volume's intended audience: women who pursued music as an amateur pastime. And, as Joncus and Rogers note, the 1803 *Songs* show the composer adopting a wider range of compositional innovations—a more independent piano part, strophic variations, interesting harmonic modulations—than are present in her earlier works.[10]

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[5] Todd M. Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 52–53.
[6] See, for example, Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold*, 76, and Andrew Crome, "The 1753 'Jew Bill' Controversy: Jewish Restoration to Palestine, Biblical Prophecy, and English National Identity," *The Oxford Historical Review* 130, no. 547 (December 2015): 1449–78.
[7] See Valerie E. Chancellor, "Anti-Racialism or Censorship? The 1802 Jewish Riots at Covent Garden Opera and the Career of Thomas John Dibdin," *The Opera Quarterly* 18 (2002): 18–25, and Michael Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation: Jews and Other Outlandish Englishmen in Georgian Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1–42.
[8] Michael Hoberman, "Home of the Jewish Nation: London Jews in the Eighteenth-Century Anglo-American Imagination," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 50, no. 3 (Spring 2017): 278–79.
[9] Erman, "The Operatic Voice of Leoni the Jew," 302, n. 32.
[10] Joncus and Rogers, "'United Voices,'" 100–3.

Even beyond these factors, however, Abrams's *Songs* invite reconsideration in light of the composer's Jewish heritage—a reconsideration that might begin from her distinctive poetic choices. Much of the poetry in the volume is not known to have been set by any other composer, underscoring what she claimed in an advertisement for a published collection at around the same time (it is unclear whether this advertisement was for the 1803 *Songs* or another volume that is now lost). In that advertisement, "The Miss ABRAMS" let it be known that they "have received from some of their literary friends twelve beautiful little ballads, which they have set to music, and are about to publish. They come from the pens of Mr. ANDREWS, Mr. LEWIS, &c."[11] The notion that the poems were personal gifts from "literary friends" might explain why some do not appear in other settings. Moreover, the thematic content might well have been surprising to some amateur musicians; especially noteworthy was Abrams's extensive use of the work of Matthew Gregory Lewis.[12] "Monk" Lewis had been the object of scrutiny ever since he had revealed himself as the author of the early Gothic novel *The Monk* (1796), which continued to scandalize authorities in the church and the government because of the challenges that it presented to religious doctrine and sexual norms. Printed in seven editions by 1800,[13] *The Monk* achieved a level of popularity and notoriety that attested to the relevance of the Gothic ethos to the anxieties surrounding Britishness in the modern age.

Perhaps no episode in *The Monk* was more widely known or discussed than that of the Wandering Jew. Based on centuries-old European lore, the Wandering Jew served as a focal point in Lewis's novel for anxieties and fantasies about the "other," with the Jew serving as a lightning rod and encapsulation of those fantasies. An ambiguous figure, the Wandering Jew in Lewis's novel is threatening, mysterious, and supernatural, but also a kind and beneficent one who grants rest to a tortured soul. This ambiguity accords with the various conflicting versions of the Wandering Jew myth in circulation in the

[11] Cited in Joncus and Rogers, "'United Voices,'" 101. While the advertisement mentions "the Miss Abrams," presumably referring to Harriett and one or more of her sisters, the *Songs* were issued only under Harriett's name. Moreover, the 1803 *Songs* do not contain any songs with texts by M. P. Andrews, who did, however, write the text for Abrams's song "A Smile and a Tear," printed individually.

[12] Abrams's extensive use of Lewis's poetry is noteworthy, though he was not unknown to other composers of song. Franz Joseph Haydn set two of Lewis's poems, "Captain Morgan's March" (Hob. XXXIb no. 8) and "The Live Long Night" (Hob. XXXIb no. 9), both in a collection of Welsh folksongs. However, Haydn cultivated far more important and productive relationships with other poets in England, in particular Anne Home Hunter. See Sarah Day-O'Connell, "The Composer, the Surgeon, His Wife and Her Poems: Haydn and the Anatomy of the English Canzonetta," *Eighteenth-Century Music* 6, no. 1 (2009): 77–112.

[13] Michael Gamer, "Authors in Effect: Lewis, Scott, and the Gothic Drama," *ELH* 66, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 844.

eighteenth century. In this respect, in Lewis's novel, the Wandering Jew assumed an ambivalence that mirrored the position of Jews in English society.

Nowhere do the texts of Abrams's *Songs* mention Jews explicitly. Yet the volume projects a poetics of the Gothic that, I suggest, would have been legible to anyone familiar with Lewis's wildly popular work.[14] On a general level, this Gothic poetics allowed women to "indulge death-related fantasies and fears" by encountering death in the tales of a range of society's most unfortunate, even demonic people.[15] More specifically, however, I suggest that the Wandering Jew underlies some of these various tales. The Wandering Jew formed the prototype for so many of the outsiders in Gothic writing by Lewis and his successors[16]; Abrams's *Songs*, too, invite a metaphorical reading through the lens of the Wandering Jew. Rather than merely asking women in polite society to sympathize with and exercise charity towards society's most unfortunate souls, Abrams's *Songs* force amateur musicians to confront and grapple with the ambivalent, outsider experiences of the Jews.

Harriett Abrams, (Jewish) Performer, and Her Conversion

Little is known of Harriett Abrams's biography.[17] She was apparently born into a musical family of Hanoverian Jewish immigrants; her mother, Esther Lyon, was sister to Michael Leoni (born Myer Lyon), who was renowned for both his operatic performances and his work as a cantor at the Great Synagogue in London, where non-Jews as well as Jews flocked to hear him sing in the 1770s.[18] Harriett Abrams's father may have worked at the Drury Lane Theatre, where the young Harriett would have her debut in 1775, having been selected for the

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[14] Joe Davies, *The Gothic Imagination in the Music of Franz Schubert* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2024), 4–6.

[15] The quoted phrase is from Carol Margaret Davison, "Introduction – The Corpse in the Closet: The Gothic, Death, and Modernity," in *The Gothic and Death*, ed. Davison (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 7; cited in Davies, *The Gothic Imagination*, 4.

[16] Tyler R. Tichelaar, *The Gothic Wanderer: From Transgression to Redemption. Gothic Literature from 1794 to Present* (s.l.: Modern History Press, 2012); see also Diane Long Hoeveler, "Charlotte Dacre's Zofloya: The Gothic Demonization of the Jew," in *The Jews and British Romanticism*, ed. Sheila A. Spector (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2:165–78.

[17] Biographical details are drawn from Philip H. Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, "Abrams, Harriet [sic]," in *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 1:23–24 (hereafter *BDA*); and Joncus and Rogers, "'United Voices." David Conway has contested some of the biographical details in these accounts—in particular, Abrams's familial connection to John Braham. Conway argues that since Braham never appeared in concert with the Abrams sisters, he is unlikely to have been their brother; see Conway, *Jewry in Music*, 81. Yet, as Vanessa Rogers pointed out to me in private communication, it would have been strange indeed for brothers and sisters to appear as singers in concert together, given that such appearances would connote a romantic relationship.

[18] See Erman, "The Operatic Voice of Leoni the Jew."

role of a gypsy girl by the Theatre's manager, David Garrick. In the 1780s, Harriett Abrams would appear in concert, singing duets and trios with her musical sisters, Theodosia and Eliza. Of the sisters, Harriett became the most prominent, appearing between 1775 and 1780 in productions at the Drury Lane Theatre, then in private concerts and benefit concerts throughout the 1780s–90s. She became a published composer, with the majority of her published output appearing in the 1790s and the first decade of the 1800s.

When Abrams made her stage debut in *May-Day, or the Little Gypsy Girl*, her Jewish ancestry was a subject of some discussion. David Garrick wrote in his diary on September 3, 1775: "I am somewhat puzzled about introducing my little jew Girl—she is surprising!—I want to introduce her as the little Gipsey with 3 or 4 exquisite Songs."[19] As Joncus and Rogers have pointed out, Garrick's selection of a young Jewish girl for a prominent role formed part of a larger tendency to capitalize on prodigies and performers of exotic origin. The *Town and Country Magazine* obliged by noting Abrams's Jewish heritage in its review of *May-Day*: "A young lady, named Abrahams, and said to be a Jewess, made her first appearance in the Gipsy, and met with great applause, her voice being very melodious and her taste for music very correct." A reviewer in the *London Chronicle* likewise noted: "It is said the Little Gipsy is a Jewess," and he added, with apparent annoyance, "the number of Jews at the Theatres is incredible."[20]

As this review suggests, the presence of Jews in the theater, both on stage and in the audience, disrupted what many audience members considered the proper social order. Tensions over Jews in professional musical and theatrical careers were one component of the larger social conflicts about the inclusion of Jews in London society. As Michael Ragussis notes, the London theaters cultivated a vast array of ethnically marked characters, conflicts among whom reflected broader questions about English national identity in the context of a quickly shifting demographic landscape:

> Perhaps the most significant development of the Georgian stage was the multiplication of ethnic, colonial, and provincial character types: Jews, Scots, Irish, Welsh, West Indians, blacks, nabobs, and Yorkshiremen paraded on the London stage. These domestic and colonial others showcased London in particular and England in general as the center of an increasingly complex and culturally mixed nation and empire, and in this way functioned to explore the emerging and shifting identity of the recently invented Great Britain, inaugurated by the union of England and Scotland in 1707. These internal others presented an especially complex and

[19] Quoted in *BDA*, 23.
[20] Ibid.

> subtle challenge to the issue of English national identity, especially since many of them were redefined and renamed as Britons in the course of the eighteenth century.[21]

David Garrick was among those theater directors involved in sensationalizing the ethnic others in this list. Composers and librettists such as Charles Dibdin, James Hook, and many others created stock characters whose words and music sometimes caricatured or mocked these others. Abrams's debut on the stage occurred within this context, and tensions over Jewish characters in the theater continued in the ensuing decades.[22]

Figure 1 Johan Joseph Zoffany, 1733–1810, German, active in Britain (from 1760), *Self-Portrait with His Daughter Maria Theresa, James Cervetto, and Giacobbe Cervetto*, ca. 1780, Oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1977.14.88

[21] On the tensions over Jews in the theater, see Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation*, 2.
[22] See Chancellor, "Anti-Racialism or Censorship?" and Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation*, 1–42.

Figure 2 Matthias Darly, etching of Jacob Cervetto, "Nosee," January 1774. British Museum, Asset no. 75457001

Off-stage, too, Jewish musicians in eighteenth-century London encountered both professional opportunities and discriminatory attitudes. The cellist Jacob Basevi Cervetto may serve as a case in point. Jacob moved to London, apparently from Venice, in the late 1730s and enjoyed a successful career as a composer, soloist, and orchestral performer, especially in theater orchestras. Although Charles Burney criticized Cervetto's tone on the instrument, Burney noted that Cervetto "brought the violoncello into favour, and made us nice judges of the instrument. . . . He was an honest Hebrew, had the largest nose, and wore the finest diamond ring on the forefinger of his bow hand."[23] In its obituary of Jacob's son, the cellist James Cervetto, printed in 1837, the *Gentlemen's Magazine* reported that audiences at Drury Lane Theater used to shout at Jacob Cervetto, "play up, Nosey," with the nickname "Nosey" apparently referring to that supposedly distinctive Jewish feature.[24] Indeed, while Johann Zoffany painted sympathetic portraits of a kindly Jacob Cervetto (Fig. 1 shows him looking on while his son James plays the cello and the artist

[23] Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* (London: The Author, 1789), 4:660.
[24] "Mr. James Cervetto," in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 7 (Apr. 1837): 437.

paints with his daughter at his side), Jacob was also caricatured with an exceptionally large nose more than once (Fig. 2).[25] While no record survives of Jacob Cervetto's conversion, he specified in his will that his burial should be in accordance with the rites of the Church of England.[26] Nevertheless, he retained connections with members of his family and London's Jewish community. He left his considerable fortune to his son James; James, in turn, left some of his legacy to members of the extended Basevi family, "including £1,000 to Maria d'Israeli (née Basevi), mother of the future Prime Minister."[27]

The ambivalent position of Jews in professional musical circles—and in London society as a whole—may have contributed to what Joncus and Rogers view as Abrams's desire to downplay or efface her Jewish identity and fashion herself, instead, as a respectable Englishwoman. Following David Garrick's death in 1779, Abrams continued to pursue a career in performance, but no longer on the theatrical stage: instead, she turned to society concerts and benefit concerts that displayed her adherence to English social norms governing women's decorum and characters. Her appearance in the Handel Commemoration at Westminster Abbey in 1784 effected, seemingly, her full transformation into a paragon of Englishness who was aligned with that most English composer.[28] Joncus and Rogers analyze Abrams's record of performances in duets and trios with her musical sisters, noting that they showed her ability to harmonize, literally and figuratively, with English society. Through the 1790s, even as she turned, increasingly, to composition, she performed with some of the leading musicians of her day, including in ensembles that included James Cervetto and Johann Peter Salomon, a Jewish immigrant from Bonn, as well as the esteemed visitor Franz Joseph Haydn.

The motivations underlying Abrams's decision to be baptized and join the Church of England are unclear. However, Jews' conversion to Christianity in eighteenth-century England was most often driven by pragmatic factors. As Todd Endelman has explained, this was especially true for Jews whose careers hinged on social networks that lay outside the Jewish community or who worked in professions not normally pursued by Jews: "It was an interest in matters outside the range of Jewish life as it had been lived previously that pulled" individuals like Abrams "away from the confines of the Jewish community. Jews who broke new ground and made careers for themselves outside the world of commerce—as artists, litérateurs, actors, and musicians,

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[25] Conway states that the moniker "Nosey" "was evidently born of affection rather than baiting," but he provides no evidence to support that assertion. See Conway, *Jewry in Music*, 71.
[26] Ibid., 72. The will is preserved in The National Archives, Kew, PRO/PROB11/1102, will proved April 16, 1783; Cited in Conway, 275, n. 32.
[27] Ibid., 72.
[28] See the description in Charles Burney, *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey . . . in Commemoration of Handel* (London: T. Payne, 1785), 80–81.

for example—in effect declared that their closest associates would be non-Jews."[29] Among Endelman's key examples is John Braham, whose romantic relationship with the non-Jewish singer Nancy Storace and subsequent marriage to a Miss Bolton both led to children raised in the Church of England. As Endelman points out, the purported increase in tolerance that supposedly characterized the eighteenth century should have rendered religion "irrelevant to social and civil status," such that "the sole motive for leaving Judaism for Christianity should have been doctrinal and spiritual conviction. In practice, matters did not work out this way. Jews continued to leave the fold for strategic reasons, but now," as the authority of the Jewish communal leadership diminished and society appeared more open to welcoming converts, "they did so more frequently."[30] And yet, as the case of Jacob Cervetto shows, conversion away from Judaism did not necessarily mean a complete rupture in ties with the community. Bonds of kinship could still hold firm even as conversion mitigated some of the negative social effects of Jewish identity. Similarly, as I will suggest in the pages that follow, it is possible that Abrams continued to grapple with the ambivalent, outsider position into which she was born as a Jew. I see her *Songs* of 1803 as encapsulating aspects of that status and affording the women who used her book the opportunity to grapple with that status themselves.

Harriett Abrams and the Poetics of the Gothic

A stark divide separates Abrams's compositions from the 1780s and the 1790s. Her 1785 collection of vocal duets adopts a style that would have been familiar to London audiences from the work of Italianate composers such as Johann Christian Bach. The poetry centers on universal themes such as idyllic, pastoral love, while the music adopts a distinctly classical architecture, with predictable phrase structures, singable melodies, and arpeggiated figuration for the accompanying keyboard or harp. The duet "Se placar volete amore," from Abrams's *Second Sett of Italian and English Canzonetts* (1785), is a case in point (see Ex. 1). Abrams sets a short ABA duet text from Pietro Metastasio's one-act pastoral *L'amor prigioniero*, a text used by numerous other composers of the eighteenth century.[31] Like many Metastasian aria texts, "Se placar volete amore" captures a playful experience of love that would, theoretically, be relevant to any singer or listener.

[29] Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714–1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 261.
[30] Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold*, 51.
[31] The text can be found in Pietro Metastasio, *Opere di Pietro Metastasio, volume unico* (Trieste: Sezione Letterario-Artistica del Lloyd Austriaco, 1857), 646. Abrams's Italian duets seem to be connected to the "duetto notturno" tradition; see Harrison James Wignall, "Mozart and the 'Duetto notturno' Tradition," *Mozart Jahrbuch* (1993): 141–61.

15
Se pla - car vo - le - te A - mo - re bel - le nin - fe in - na - mo - ra - te im - pa-

19
-ra - te - lo da me im - pa - ra - te - lo da me.
Voi cru-

23
-del ren - de - te A - mo - re bel - le Nin - fe in - na - mo - ra - te col di-

Example 1 Harriett Abrams, "Se placar volete amore," mm. 15–30, from *A Second Sett of Italian and English Canzonetts* (London: Lavenu, 1785)

By the late 1790s, Abrams's song style had changed markedly. She turned to setting poetry—primarily in the genre of the narrative ballad—that was more specific in its themes and more unsettling in its imagery and messages. Among her greatest hits from this decade was the song "Crazy Jane," a strophic ballad about a woman who is driven mad when her false lover leaves her. While the theme of spurned love is often explored in an idealized, generalized manner by Metastasio, the poem "Crazy Jane," by Matthew Gregory Lewis, makes the experience of rejection and the madness that it could engender more specific and shocking in its aesthetic impact. Perhaps the most affecting aspect of the poem is the social ostracization that Jane experiences as she meets another young woman and tells her tale:

> Why, fair maid, in every feature
> Are such signs of fear expressed?
> Can a wand'ring, wretched creature
> With such terror fill thy breast?

Madness manifests itself in Jane's outward appearance; like a fallen woman in a Dickensian novel, Jane's story serves as a cautionary tale for the "fair maid" whom she encounters. In this episode, a social insider comes face-to-face with an outsider who inspires a sense of terror in her.

In discussing Abrams's setting of "Crazy Jane" (1799) Joncus and Rogers note that the theme of the madwoman "had since the Restoration provoked some of the most sophisticated vocal compositions, such as the treatments by Henry Purcell and Henry Carey. Despite her stage background, Abrams set 'Crazy Jane' as a strophic ballad that made no musical demands on the performer, and contained no irrational procedures typical of theatrical mad songs." This

approach, they suggest, was part of Abrams's deliberate decision to cultivate "amateur consumption by avoiding any procedures that might challenge the novice. . . . The simplicity of the piece allowed it to become a popular hit."[32] I agree with Joncus and Rogers's characterization of Abrams's compositional approach overall, but I think there is more at stake in Abrams's setting.

To understand Abrams's approach, it is useful to consider it alongside one of the many songs that it inspired: "The Death of Crazy Jane," set by James Hook to poetry by Robert Anderson and published in 1807 (see the opening in Ex. 2). Hook's setting is in D minor, and he takes advantage of the mode's dark qualities to create a sense of eeriness and dread. Anderson's poem starts from the perspective of a third-person narrator who relates, from a distance, that Jane sits alone at night on the heath, "her wild woes telling / to the winds and beating rain." Even in the second and third stanzas, when Jane speaks in the first person, she encounters no other real character—only her beloved, Henry, as a figment of her imagination: "Ah! no, no, my senses wander, / Since he comes not, welcome death." The third-person narrator resumes speaking at the end of the third stanza to describe Jane's death. Throughout "The Death of Crazy Jane," Hook's setting, at least on paper, remains consistent. The eerie contours of the minor mode, enhanced by a performance "Con molto espressione," are heard throughout.

Abrams's setting of Lewis's poem "Crazy Jane" is starkly different. The music and poetry work hand-in-glove to inspire terror in a more immediate way than does the piece by Anderson and Hook. On first encounter, as Joncus and Rogers explain, Abrams's "Crazy Jane" seems innocuous. Set in B-flat major, its diatonic, conjunct melody would be equally at home in Abrams's collection of pastoral canzonettas. Yet, through this seemingly pastoral music, "Crazy Jane" gained admittance to the parlors of London's polite society. Unlike Anderson's poem, Lewis's is told entirely in the first person, and the "fair maid" whom she addresses could have been any respectable Englishwoman. In a process that became standard for Abrams's treatment of strophic poetry, she writes out the music for every stanza, including subtle variations in both the performance indications and the contours of the music in each. Rhythmic details illustrate Henry's false professions of love: the use of sixteenth-notes and rests depict the phrase "he sigh'd, he vow'd" vividly, almost pantingly (see Ex. 3).[33] Abrams also calls for tempo fluctuations from one stanza to the next to represent

[32] Joncus and Rogers, "'United Voices,'" 94.
[33] Sarah Day-O'Connell's discussion of the "anatomy" of the sigh in Haydn's settings of poetry by Anne Hunter is apposite; see Day-O'Connell, "The Composer, the Surgeon, His Wife and Her Poems."

Largo e sempre piano

Con molto espressione

pp

'Twas at the hour when night re - treat - ing, Bade the screech Owl seek her Nest, Gloo - my va - pours slow were fleet - ing, Mor-ning

Example 2 James Hook, "The Death of Crazy Jane," mm. 1–10, poetry by Robert Anderson (1807)

Jane's madness: "From that hour has reason never held her empire o'er my brain" is to be sung "a little faster," while "forever fled the wits of Crazy Jane" should be sung "ad lib." These subtle variations in Abrams's musical setting suggest that she is only barely adhering to the norms of polite song.

I suggest that Abrams's song attained its power through the dissonance between Jane's madness and the seemingly harmless, pastoral setting of her music. This suggestion is supported by the account of the origin of Lewis's poem, published in *The Life and Correspondence of M. G. Lewis* (1839), which emphasizes the aesthetic effect that emerges from encounters with the other in

34

Fond-ly my___ young heart re - ceiv'd him which was doom'd to love but

37

one he sigh'd, he vow'd and I be - liev'd_him he was false and I un -

41

a little faster

done from that hour has rea-son ne-ver held her Em-pire o'er___ my

45

ad lib.

brain Hen-ry fled with him for e - ver fled the wits of Cra - zy Jane.

Example 3 Harriett Abrams, "Crazy Jane," mm. 34–49, poetry by Matthew Gregory Lewis (1799)

the course of ordinary life. According to this account, "Crazy Jane" was based on a real incident, in which Lewis and a woman whom he was courting were walking the woods on her estate. It was during one of the many

> summer rambles taken by the young poet in the woods surrounding Inverary Castle, with her whose companionship made the picturesque scenery still more beautiful... that the encounter with a poor maniac occurred, which gave rise to the well-known ballad of "Crazy Jane." The alarm naturally excited in the breast of the lady, at a meeting so startling—possibly exaggerated by the imagination of Lewis—threw an air of romance over the adventure, which, infused into the poem, gained for it a degree of popularity scarcely yet abated.[34]

In other words, it was the intrusion of madness into an otherwise beautiful, idyllic landscape—and the shocking incongruity of that experience—that aroused the sense of "alarm," "romance," and "adventure" in Lewis's female companion. The effect of this incongruity is a key feature of the Gothic literature of which Lewis was an important contributor. In the words of Carol Margaret Davidson, "The Gothic trades in compelling and telling confrontations and transactions between the Self and the Other. Frequently gendered and/or racialized and figured as a *revolting* monster in both the physical and political senses of that word, the Other usually functions as an externalization and mirror of the Self's otherwise repressed, socially unacceptable and unsanctioned propensities."[35]

This fascination with the aesthetic dissonance between the ordinary and the terrifying helps to explain the phenomenon of the so-called "Crazy Jane hat," a straw hat "tied with ribbon under the chin and bedecked with poppies, wheat ears and corn flowers" that became popular as a material manifestation of Lewis's character.[36] No exemplars or images of the hat appear to have survived. However, like Abrams's melody, the hat is described as a consumable object that would have been at home in polite society; yet the hat carried the potential to hide something darker. Just as Lewis and his companion experienced both "alarm" and "adventure" through this juxtaposition, the women who sang Abrams's song had the opportunity to experience the thrilling dissonance between beauty and madness.

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[34] Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Life and Correspondence of M. G. Lewis: With Many Pieces in Prose and Verse Never Before Published*, ed. Margaret Baron-Wilson (London: Henry Colburn, 1839), 187–88.

[35] Carol Margaret Davison, *The History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1764–1824* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 32.

[36] Cited in Joncus and Rogers, "'Universal Harmony,'" 94. On the consumer culture surrounding women's madness, see Anna Jamieson, "Crazy Jane Hats and Maria Medallions: Consuming, Collecting and Containing Love's Madness," in *Wearable Objects and Curative Things: Materialist Approaches to the Intersections of Fashion, Art, Health and Medicine*, ed. Dawn Woolley et al. (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 315–38.

Abrams's songs from the 1790s and early 1800s are filled with such specific, personal experiences that bring amateur musicians and their listeners into contact with the terrifying unknown in the form of society's others. "The Orphan's Prayer" is another poem told entirely from the first-person perspective of an orphan starving on the street and begging for food. As with "Crazy Jane," no third-person narrator interjects to inform the listener that the orphan has died. Instead, the orphan himself looks ahead to his own death—and to the effect that it will have on the strangers who have ignored his pleas for help: "But thou, proud man, the beggar scorning, / Unmoved who saw'st me kneel for bread, / Thy heart shall ache to hear at morning / That morning found the beggar dead." Moreover, the orphan predicts that the sound of his pleas will echo in the memory of the hard-hearted stranger, intermingling with the real sounds of the stranger's comfortable world: "And when the room resounds with laughter / My famish'd cry thy mirth shall scare, / And often shalt thou wish hereafter / Thou hadst not scorned the orphan's prayer." The orphan is a prophet who anticipates the echoes of his own otherworldly voice.

Again, Abrams's setting of "The Orphan's Prayer" is in the major mode with a diatonic, easily singable melody. And again, she writes out each stanza, introducing subtle variations in the rhythmic profile of the melody and accompanying figuration for harp or keyboard that help to illustrate the song's emotional content. In the second stanza, for example, where the orphan hears the footsteps of a stranger approaching, the accompaniment adopts a busy, Lombard rhythm that reflects the orphan's breathlessness; that stanza is marked "a little faster," likewise reflecting the orphan's anticipation (Ex. 4).

Beyond settings of poems by Lewis, Abrams seems to have gone out of her way to select texts that effect the same personal, immediate juxtaposition of beauty and terror. Such a juxtaposition occurs in a fascinating way in "The White Man," the text of which is drawn from Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799). Park's travel diary recounts the author's own experience of being lost and alone on the African continent. The women whom he encountered, he reported, "lightened their labour by songs, one of which was composed extempore; for I was myself the subject of it."[37] Park's first-person text highlights the reality of the grave danger in which he found himself. The diary goes on to describe and translate the women's song in prose:

[37] Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: Performed under the Direction and Patronage of the African Association in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797* (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1799), 198.

2.d Verse a little faster
17
Hark, hark, for sure - ly foot - steps near me ad - van - cing
19
press the drift - ed Snow! I die for food oh Stran - ger
p
22
hear me, I die_ for_ food some alms_ be - stow, you see no
25
3
guil - ty wretch im - plore you no wan - ton pleads in feign'd_ des-
3
f

Example 4 Harriett Abrams, "The Orphan's Prayer," mm. 17–32, poetry by Matthew Gregory Lewis

> It was sung by one of the young women, the rest joining in a sort of chorus. The air was sweet and plaintive, and the words, literally translated, were these.—"The winds roared, and the rains fell.—The poor white man, faint and weary, came and sat under our tree.—He has no mothing to bring him milk; no wife to grind his corn. *Chorus*. Let us pity the white man; no mother has he, &c. &c." Trifling as this recital may appear to the reader, to a person in my situation, the circumstance was affecting in the highest degree.[38]

Park's travel diary was published with an appendix containing a stylized, poetic rendering of this episode by the Duchess of Devonshire, together with a musical setting of that poetic version by the Italian-born composer Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari.[39] The duchess's poem brings Park's prose under control by setting it in iambic tetrameter—the ideal meter for song. Ferrari's song obliges: while it opens with keyboard tremolos that alternate with long-held chords, the rest of the song proceeds in an entirely predictable, syllabic manner; strong words are emphasized by plodding chords (Ex. 5).

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., postscript after p. 372.

Adagio

The loud wind

7

roar'd, the rain fell fast, the white man yiel - ded to the blast: he sat him

11

down be-neath our tree, for wea - ry, sad and faint was_ he, and ah! no

Example 5 Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari, "Song from Mr. Park's Travels, the Words by the Dutchess of Devonshire," mm. 1–14, in Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*.

In a striking deviation from the norms of ballad composition, Harriett Abrams eschewed the duchess's version of the poem. Instead, her ballad "The White Man" set to music Park's prose translation of the African women's song, thus giving the impression of a more immediate and unmediated experience for singers and listeners. The opening measures, marked "Ad lib.^{m}," feature arpeggios that imitate the stormy wind and rain. The melody that follows is, like that of Abrams's other songs, diatonic, easily singable, and largely conjunct; yet the absence of a clear poetic meter and rhyming patterns endows it with a sense

of unfamiliarity (Ex. 6). While Ferrari's setting includes a second voice in the Chorus, the two voices are entirely homophonic; by contrast, Abrams's setting seems to elevate the African women's music making when she composes the Chorus as a three-voice part song.

The sense of alienation in "The White Man" is different from that of "Crazy Jane." In this case, it is the white man who appears as a solitary, threatening stranger in Africa; the African women who find him caught in a storm take him into their homes and care for him. In this sense, Abrams—following the example set by Park's travel diary—challenges her audience's expectations around who represents a threat and who exercises compassion. In addition to forming a musical contribution to the English abolitionist movement,[40] Abrams's ballad offered Englishwomen an aesthetic experience that challenged conventional understanding. This aesthetic experience again revolves around the gap between beauty—here figured as maternal care—and danger.

Abrams's independently published songs from around 1800 repeatedly address themes of alienation and otherness, allowing performers and listeners to experience the unfamiliar through her essentially familiar musical materials—tonal harmonies, easily singable, conjunct melodies, use of domestic instruments and media—albeit with subtle variations in each stanza that convey the impression that something more is at stake. This is not merely a question of allowing Englishwomen to sympathize with society's less fortunate, but of brining Englishwomen into seemingly immediate and direct contact with apparently threatening figures in society. In this way, users of Abrams's published music could experience what Lewis's companion experienced when they met the prototype of Crazy Jane: a sense of "alarm," mitigated by an "air of romance." Harriett Abrams developed a musical poetics of the Gothic that revolved around the juxtaposition of beauty and madness, domestic care and external threat, life-sustaining generosity and imminent death.

Ad Lib.m

f

The winds roard, and the rain fell, The

[40] On music in the English abolitionist movement, see Julia Hamilton, "Political Songs in Polite Society: Singing about Africans in the Time of the British Abolition Movement, 1787 to 1807" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2021).

5 Larghetto

poor white man faint and wea-ry, Came and sat

10

un - der our tree, Came and sat un - der our tree.

15

He has no mo-ther to bring him milk, No wife to

20

grind his corn, No wife to grind his corn.

Example 6 Harriett Abrams, "The White Man," mm. 1–24, text from Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*

Abrams's Gothic Songbook and the Archetype of the Wandering Jew

That Abrams's *Songs* of 1803 consists of twelve pieces suggests that the volume was conceived as a set; twelve, after all, was understood as a number of completion in the construction of a musical opus.[41] Therefore, even if some of the pieces were also sold independently, as Candace Bailey has reasonably posited, the collection should also be considered an intentionally constructed set.[42] As I will suggest, Abrams's *Songs* present an expansive picture of the specific characters who make up the most unfortunate ranks of English society. Moreover, the volume's aesthetics demonstrate Abrams's Gothic poetics at work, in that it stages encounters between Englishwomen and the threatening figures and experiences that comprise Gothic literature. Finally, I will suggest, the Gothic figures at the heart of many of these songs can trace their roots back to the prototypical figure of the Wandering Jew; the songs may thus be understood to engage with the outsider status of Jews within British society.

As Table 1 shows, the poetry that Abrams set in her *Songs* features numerous tropes associated with the Gothic. The characters featured in the narrative ballads come from the dark underworld of English society: they are immigrants, madwomen, divorced and hate-filled couples, gamblers, released felons. With the one exception of the first song, "Nanine, or the Emigrant," these narrative ballads end in death. The characters discuss death openly and address it directly. In their diegetic sounds, several of the poems evoke the Gothic, too: echoes resound, and musical instruments seem to play themselves. The physical settings also evoke terror: castles, insane asylums, suffocating prisons, stormy seas, moonlit nights. The excesses of the characters' tales, set in these haunting landscapes and soundscapes, are key aspects of the Gothic literary style. Much as this style was meant to evoke charitable sympathy, it also had the aesthetic effect of arousing fear and allowing readers and listeners to confront their own anxieties.

[41] See Elaine R. Sisman, "Six of One: The Opus Concept in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Century of Bach and Mozart: Perspectives on Historiography, Composition, Theory & Performance,* ed. Thomas Forrest Kelly and Sean Gallagher (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 79–107.

[42] See Candace Bailey, "A Cry for Recognition: Harriett Abrams Songs of 1803," *Women's Song Forum*, https://www.womensongforum.org/2023/06/24/a-cry-for-recognition-harriett-abramss-songs-of-1803/ (accessed Oct. 23, 2024).

Table 1. Contents and Gothic themes of the poetry in Harriett Abrams's *Songs* (1803)

No.	Title	Poet	Gothic Themes
1	Nanine, or the Emigrant	Matthew Gregory Lewis	An unidentified woman, an immigrant, lands on (English?) shores. She laments her status as a wanderer. She is taken in by the kindly boatman who transported her there. They marry and live together happily.
2	The Eolian Harp	J[oseph?] Atkinson	The aeolian harp is an instrument that seems to "play itself" when the wind blows.
3	The Emigrant's Grave	William Robert Spencer	Another song about an immigrant—this time a French soldier.
4	The Gamester	Miles Peter Andrews	A wife awaits the return of her husband, who gambles away their money each night. In the final stanza he dies by suicide.
5	The Felon	Matthew Gregory Lewis	A felon who has served his prison term is unable to find work or fellowship. He dies at the end of the song, perhaps by suicide.
6	The Goaler	Matthew Gregory Lewis	A woman pleads with her jailer to release her from an insane asylum. The jailer scorns her and refuses to release her. In the final stanza she is terrified by another incarcerated person breaking his chains, and she declares that she soon will go mad.

7	Hope	Anne Hunter	Disembodied sounds and echoes are heard in the dead of night.
8	Address to Death	Rev. William Cockburne	A soldier serving in Africa confronts death and addresses it directly.
9	William and Susan	Matthew Gregory Lewis	A couple, once in love, have become mistrustful and estranged.
10	Love out of Place	William Robert Spencer	A devoted servant is turned away from his place of employment. (It is unclear if he is enslaved.)
11	The Farewell	Henry Temple, 2nd Viscount Palmerston	A sailor must leave home and endure the stormy seas. His fear and sorrow are relieved by death.
12	A Ballad of the Eighteenth Century	Anne Hunter	In the dark of night, a madwoman breaks free of her chains and confronts her estranged husband at a banquet in his home. The song ends in her death.

As noted earlier, none of the pieces in Abrams's *Songs* features a Jewish character explicitly. Yet the central figure in the first song, "Nanine, or the Emigrant," a penniless immigrant dependent on the majority culture to welcome her, may be read as a stand-in for a Jew. Weeping, she arrives by boat, "left expos'd to want and danger, / Friendless on a foreign shore," and she asks, "Far from home, an exile roving, / Where shall now my shelter be?" The kindly boatman who had transported her implores her to stop weeping. Indeed, while the voice of a narrator suggests that Nanine "die and weep no more," the boatman extends his compassion and ultimately professes his love. He surrenders his worldly wealth to her, feeds her, takes her in, and finally "gain[s] her heart and hand."

In her musical setting, Abrams applies the same approach to "Nanine, or the Emigrant" that she uses in her independently published songs, effecting a stark juxtaposition between the Gothic outsider and a familiar musical vocabulary. (See Ex. 7.) In this case, the variations that she introduces in the

f 59

Mark he cried yon dis - tant Ci - ty, there my

f

61

p

shel - ter thine shall be. Mark my bo - som swelled by_

64

f

pi - ty there's an heart which feels for thee, all my

67

wealth I here sur - ren- der; 'tis not

69
gems, nor shin - ing ore:___ 'tis an heart warm, ho-nest

72
p
ten-der take it sweet take it sweet take it sweet and weep no more.

Example 7 Harriett Abrams, "Nanine, or the Immigrant," mm. 59–76, poetry by Matthew Gregory Lewis, from *Songs* (1803)

keyboard part of the final stanza are especially affecting: for example, she again uses dotted rhythms to reflect the anticipation and excitement of the boatman. These dotted figures contrast with the musical illustration of his sighing heart, "warm, honest, tender," marked *piano*. As the boatman walks Nanine home, the keyboard plays sixteenth-note figuration, representative of their footsteps and forward motion.

While Nanine may be understood to represent any refugee or immigrant to England—Scottish, Irish, French, even African—the trope of wandering would probably have associated this character with the Jews, the quintessential wandering people. (Even her name bears ambiguous associations, deriving jointly from the French "Annette" and the Hebrew "Hannah."[43]) Indeed, the figure of the Wandering Jew had a long history in England; having received a

[43] It may be significant that "Nanine" was the name that the notoriously antisemitic Voltaire used in his adaptation of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, a paragon of virtuous, pious English womanhood. Lewis's poem seems to appropriate the name Nanine, assigning it instead to a mysterious outsider. Nanine's story also seems to foreshadow the opening of Fanny Burney's novel *The Wanderer* (published in 1814), in which a mysterious woman, traveling alone, arrives in England by boat. She wears bandages to mask her identity and is taunted by the others traveling with her, all of them refugees from the Terror.

fresh interpretation in Lewis's novel *The Monk*, the Wandering Jew became the prototype for the outsiders and others who populate Gothic literature.

The Wandering Jew is not just a generic figure, but a specific character from Christian lore. A cursed figure who taunted Jesus on his way to the crucifixion, the Wandering Jew was doomed thereafter to wander the earth until the Second Coming and the resurrection of the dead. The story may be rooted in the Jews' exile from their homeland and their subsequent cycle of wanderings and expulsions from countries around the globe; it may also refer to the biblical story of Cain, who was doomed to wander the earth as a punishment for killing his brother Abel. Because of his evil deeds, the Wandering Jew assumed a threatening, dangerous aspect. Because of his inability to die, he is supernatural and mysterious. In some versions of the story, the Wandering Jew is described as having repented for his evil deeds and accepted Jesus as savior; thus, although he is doomed to continue his punishment until the Second Coming, he sometimes appears as benevolent, sympathetic, and tragic.

In England, two major strands of ballad poetry depict the Wandering Jew. First is the "Wandering Jew's Chronicle," a poem that underwent numerous revisions and expansions between 1634 and 1830.[44] Oddly, this chronicle scarcely features the Wandering Jew at all; instead, it enumerates, in rhyming verse, the kings and queens of England from the time of William the Conqueror to the time of publication. Yet the Wandering Jew underlies the chronicle by bearing witness to England's long history. Although Jews had been expelled from England in 1290 and were not yet formally readmitted by 1634, the Wandering Jew was called upon to attest to the splendor of England's royalty.

The other ballad tradition involving the Wandering Jew originated in the late seventeenth century, with the first publication of "The Wandering Jew, or, the Shoemaker of Jerusalem," first published between 1688 and 1709[45]; broadside reprints appeared throughout the eighteenth century, and the text was included in the 1765 collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, assembled by Bishop Thomas Percy.[46] This ballad casts the Wandering Jew as a repentant,

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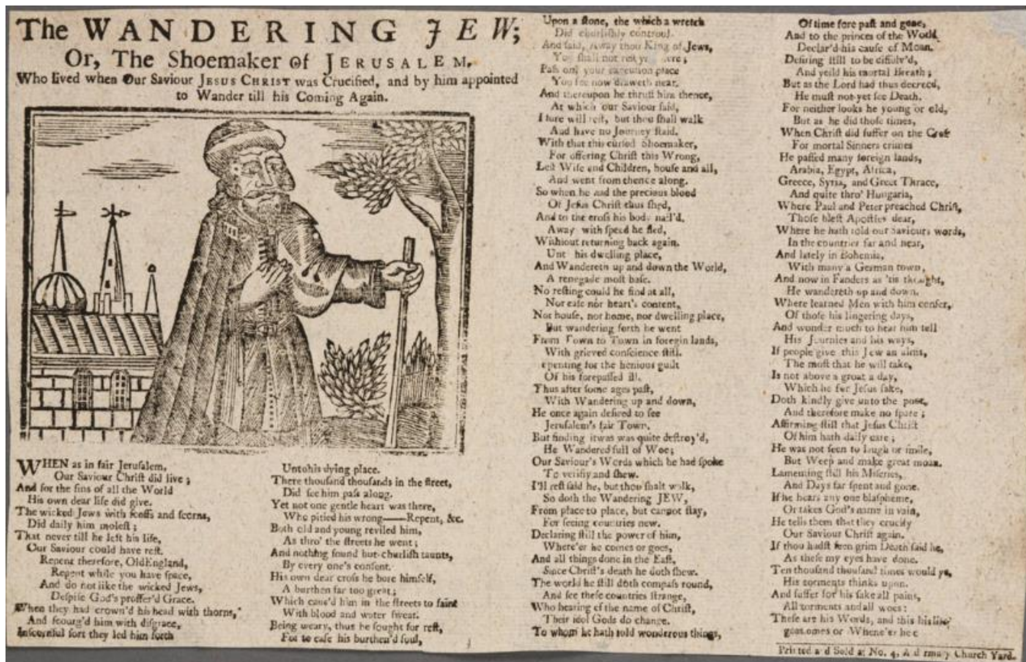
[44] The website "The Wand'ring Jew's Chronicle" http://wjc.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/index.html (accessed Oct. 23, 2024) is devoted to the many textual and pictorial variants of this ballad.

[45] See the English Broadside Ballad Archive, https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/33903/citation (accessed Oct. 23, 2024), for the earliest version of "The Wandering Jew, or, the Shoemaker of Jerusalem."

[46] Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of our Earlier Poets* (London: J. Dodsley, 1765), 2:282–88. Percy's *Reliques* also contain the antisemitic poem "Gernutus, or the Jew of Venice," described as "A new song, shewing the cruelty of Gernutus, a Jew, who lending to a merchant an hundred crowns, would have a pound of flesh, because he could not pay him at the time appointed." In its earliest forms, this poem may have been an inspiration for Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. Matthew Gregory Lewis included "Gernutus" in his *Tales of Wonder* (Vienna: R. Sammer, 1805), 3:244–53.

charitable figure. In some versions, as in the broadsheet from ca. 1795 (Fig. 3), the lesson for English readers and listeners is explicit: “Repent, therefore, Old England, / Repent while you have space, / And do not like the wicked Jews, / Despite God’s proffer’d Grace.”[47]



The WANDERING JEW;
Or, The Shoemaker of JERUSALEM.
Who lived when Our Saviour JESUS CHRIST was Crucified, and by him appointed to Wander till his Coming Again.

WHEN as in fair Jeruſalem,
Our Saviour Chriſt did live;
And for the ſins of all the World
His own dear life did give.
The wicked Jews with ſcoffs and ſcorns,
Did daily him moleſt;
That never till he left his life,
Our Saviour could have reſt.
Repent therefore, Old England,
Repent while you have ſpace,
And do not like the wicked Jews,
Deſpiſe God's proffer'd Grace.
When they had crown'd his head with thorns,
And ſcourg'd him with diſgrace,
In ſcornful ſort they led him forth
Unto his dying place.
There thouſand thouſands in the ſtreet,
Did ſee him paſs along.
Yet not one gentle heart was there,
Who pitied his wrong——Repent, &c.
Both old and young reviled him,
As thro' the ſtreets he went;
And nothing found but churliſh taunts,
By every one's conſent.
His own dear croſs he bore himſelf,
A burthen far too great;
Which cauſ'd him in the ſtreets to faint
With blood and water ſweat.
Being weary, thus he ſought for reſt,
For to eaſe his burthen'd ſoul,
Upon a ſtone, the which a wretch
Did churliſhly controul.
And ſaid, Away thou King of Jews,
You ſhall not reſt [illegible] here;
Paſs on, your execution place
You ſee now draweth near.
And thereupon he thruſt him thence,
At which our Saviour ſaid,
I ſure will reſt, but thou ſhalt walk
And have no Journey ſtaid.
With that this curſed Shoemaker,
For offering Chriſt this Wrong,
Left Wife and Children, houſe and all,
And went from thence along.
So when he and the precious blood
Of Jeſus Chriſt thus ſhed,
And to the croſs his body nail'd,
Away with ſpeed he fled,
Without returning back again.
Unt[illegible] his dwelling place,
And Wandereth up and down the World,
A renegade moſt baſe.
No reſting could he find at all,
Nor eaſe nor heart's content,
Nor houſe, nor home, nor dwelling place,
But wandering forth he went
From Town to Town in foreign lands,
With grieved conſcience ſtill.
[illegible]epenting for the heinous guilt
Of his forepaſſed ill.
Thus after ſome ages paſt,
With Wandering up and down,
He once again deſired to ſee
Jeruſalem's fair Town,
But finding it was was quite deſtroy'd,
He Wandered full of Woe;
Our Saviour's Words which he had ſpoke
To verify and ſhew.
I'll reſt ſaid he, but thou ſhalt walk,
So doth the Wandering JEW,
From place to place, but cannot ſtay,
For ſeeing countries new.
Declaring ſtill the power of him,
Where'er he comes or goes,
And all things done in the Eaſt,
Since Chriſt's death he doth ſhew.
The world he ſtill doth compaſs round,
And ſee theſe countries ſtrange,
Who hearing of the name of Chriſt,
Their idol Gods do change.
To whom he hath told wonderous things,
Of time fore paſt and gone,
And to the princes of the World
Declar'd his cauſe of Moan.
Deſiring ſtill to be diſſolv'd,
And yeild his mortal Breath;
But as the Lord had thus decreed,
He muſt not yet ſee Death.
For neither looks he young or old,
But as he did thoſe times,
When Chriſt did ſuffer on the Croſs
For mortal Sinners crimes
He paſſed many foreign lands,
Arabia, Egypt, Africa,
Greece, Syria, and Great Thrace,
And quite thro' Hungaria,
Where Paul and Peter preached Chriſt,
Thoſe bleſt Apoſtles dear,
Where he hath told our Saviours words,
In the countries far and near,
And lately in Bohemia,
With many a German town,
And now in Flanders as 'tis thought,
He wandereth up and down.
Where learned Men with him confer,
Of thoſe his lingering days,
And wonder much to hear him tell
His Journies and his ways,
If people give this Jew an alms,
The moſt that he will take,
Is not above a groat a day,
Which he for Jeſus ſake,
Doth kindly give unto the poor,
And therefore make no ſpare;
Affirming ſtill that Jeſus Chriſt
Of him hath daily care;
He was not ſeen to laugh or ſmile,
But Weep and make great moan.
Lamenting ſtill his Miſeries,
And Days far ſpent and gone.
If he hears any one blaſpheme,
Or takes God's name in vain,
He tells them that they crucify
Our Saviour Chriſt again.
If thou hadſt ſeen grim Death ſaid he,
As theſe my eyes have done.
Ten thouſand thouſand times would ye,
His torments think upon.
And ſuffer for his ſake all pains,
All torments and all woes:
Theſe are his Words, and this his life
[illegible]

Printed and Sold at No. 4, Aldermary Church Yard.

Figure 3 “The wandering Jew or, the shoemaker of Jerusalem,” broadside ballad printed ca. 1795. Huntington Library, https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p15150coll3/id/5585/ (accessed October 27, 2024)

Carol Margaret Davison’s *Anti-Semitism and British Gothic Literature* makes it clear both how pervasive the Wandering Jew became in Gothic literature and how that figure reflected deeply rooted anxieties about the presence of the Jew in British society around the turn of the nineteenth century. Responding to the dual upheavals of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, leading British thinkers began to articulate what set Britishness apart in the realms of politics, social dynamics, cultural production, and national character. The Jew, only recently readmitted into English society, represented a threat to British identity in all these areas. As Davison writes, “As the parameters of Western European national identity were being debated and the prospect of Jewish assimilation was being broached, [the Wandering Jew] became an agent of the

[47] See also “The JEW ERRANT (or WANDERING JEW),” *A New and General Biographical Dictionary*, 12 vols. (London: W. Strahan et al., 1784), 7:391–95.

uncanny"—that central aesthetic feature of the Gothic.[48] Davison continues by noting that the Wandering Jew should not be understood, simply, as a general outsider; rather, "this Gothic terrorist haunts Enlightenment certainties *in very ethnically specific ways*: while his wandering implies internationalism that transcends racial and national boundaries, he nonetheless remains a Wandering *Jew*,"[49] with all the negative tropes and associations normally called up by Jews: the large, beaked nose, magical/demonic powers, shape-shifting, bloodthirstiness, parasitic behavior, and so on. Jewish assimilation and conversion are threatening precisely because they bring the Jew so close to home. Like the madwoman Crazy Jane, the Wandering Jew may be encountered anywhere; unlike Jane, with her wild appearance, the Wandering Jew is often unrecognizable until it is too late. Davison characterizes "the ambivalently positioned Wandering Jew" as "a dark double to Enlightenment Britain" who "make[s] his first literary appearance in the pages of Gothic fiction."[50]

Although the episode involving the Wandering Jew occupies only a few pages of Lewis's Gothic novel *The Monk* (1796), that episode was among the most sensational and talked-about aspects of the book.[51] In a side plot of the novel, the character Raymond encounters a veiled woman whom he thinks is his beloved, Agnes, at night in the Castle of Lindenberg; removing her veil, however, he finds that the woman is the Bleeding Nun, an ancient, ghostly figure who haunts the castle. She had been a prostitute during her lifetime and is now punished by being unable to rest in death. The Wandering Jew appears as a magical figure who exorcises the ghost from the Bleeding Nun, thus allowing her to rest and allowing Raymond temporary respite from his terror.

In *The Monk*, the Wandering Jew appears to Raymond as a nameless man bearing a "majestic presence; his countenance was strongly marked, and his eyes were large, black, and sparkling: yet there was something in his look, which, the moment that I saw him, inspired me with a secret awe, not to say horror." Without revealing his identity, the Wandering Jew describes meeting "people who had ceased to exist for many centuries, yet with whom he appeared to have been personally acquainted." Yet these travels have given him no

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[48] Carol Margaret Davison, *Anti-Semitism and British Gothic Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 21.

[49] Ibid., 28.

[50] Ibid., 24.

[51] While the story of the Wandering Jew formed only a minor subplot of *The Monk*, it became one of the best-known vignettes in Lewis's oeuvre. Subsequent editions of the novel noted on their title pages that the work featured "the story of the bleeding nun and the method by which the wandering Jew quieted the nun's troubled spirit." While Samuel Taylor Coleridge was unimpressed by the novel overall, he admitted that "the tale of the bleeding nun is truly terrific; and we could not easily recollect a bolder or more happy conception than that of the burning cross on the forehead of the wandering Jew." See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, review of *The Monk: A Romance*, *Critical Review* 19 (February 1797): 194.

pleasure; he cannot stay "more than a fortnight in the same place. I have no friend in the world, and, from the restlessness of my destiny, I never can acquire one. Fain would I lay down my miserable life, for I envy those who enjoy the quiet of the grave: but death eludes me, and flies from my embrace." Seeing Raymond shudder, the Wandering Jew says, "Such is the curse imposed on me. . . . I am doomed to inspire all who look on me with terror and detestation. You already feel the influence of the charm, and with every succeeding moment will feel it more."[52]

The anonymity of the Wandering Jew in *The Monk* is a key element of this plot line. He is recognizable only by a burning cross imprinted on his forehead, but he first wears a velvet band around his head to mask that mark. It is only later that Raymond is informed of the Wandering Jew's identity. Although he appears here as a repentant soul—one who performs a service by exorcising the ghost of the Bleeding Nun—the Wandering Jew continues to pay for his misdeeds. Yet the sympathy that might be aroused from this portrayal is inherently problematic: As Tyler R. Tichelaar explains, "the scene must be read metaphorically, with the understanding that the Jew's crime serves as a symbol for the entire Jewish race's rejection of Christ as Son of God."[53] That is, as repentant as the Wandering Jew may be, he calls attention to the ongoing affront to Christianity posed by the persistence of Judaism in the modern age.

Read against this backdrop, Abrams's and Lewis's song "Nanine, or the Emigrant" does not merely inspire sympathy for poor immigrants. Instead, Nanine emerges as a wanderer, an ambiguous figure perhaps modeled on the figure of the Wandering Jew, although she is a woman. With her linguistically vague name and her unknown origins, she is ushered onto British soil and becomes part of the boatman's family; she blends into the "city" and thereby into British society, becoming one of the many foreigners who make up its cosmopolitan identity. While readers, performers, and listeners who engage with Abrams's song might feel a sense of relief that Nanine's story ends happily, Nanine's situation cuts to the heart of British anxieties about national identity and the ambiguous position of assimilated outsiders.

Nanine's song opens the door to a reading of Abrams's *Songs* as a Gothic songbook. While the Wandering Jew does not lurk obviously behind each story, he can be understood as the prototype for several of them. This is clear in "The Emigrants Grave," a song about another immigrant—this one from France. Yet, as Michael Ragussis has shown, in the minds of early nineteenth-century Britons, the French and the Jews were essentially interchangeable, and the French were often taken as stand-ins for Jews; both were thought to have

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[52] I quote from Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Ambrosio, or the Monk: A Romance*, 4th ed. (London: J. Bell, 1798), 2:76–80.
[53] Tichelaar, *The Gothic Wanderer*, 48.

revolutionary ideas that would upset the social harmony of Britain and her domains.[54] Here, the immigrant is a man, a former soldier, who had been exiled from France. Brought into a British village, the immigrant gains the sympathy of its residents; upon his death, they weep over him and even assume some of his status as a wanderer: "How oft shall we wander at moonlight to weep / O'er the stranger we lov'd, the poor Exile of France." (See Ex. 8.)

119
To the church bid-den bride shall thy mem'-ry im-part, One pang, as her

124
eyes_ on_ thy_ cold_ re-lics glance. One flower from her gar-land, one

129
tear_ from her heart, Shall drop on the grave of the Ex - ile of France.

Example 8 Harriett Abrams, "The Emigrant's Grave," mm. 119–34, poetry by William Robert Spencer, from *Songs* (1803). Note the syncopated figure at the end of each stanza (here, "Shall drop on the grave")

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[54] Michael Ragussis, "Writing Nationalist History: England, the Conversion of the Jews, and *Ivanhoe*," *ELH* 60, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 181–215.

Abrams's songs about suffering wives bear echoes of the Wandering Jew, as well. Julia, the wife in the "The Gamester," sits alone, anxiously awaiting the return of her husband, who has become addicted to gambling—a victim of financial parasitism that would have recalled the threat of alleged Jewish usury. Abrams's keyboard accompaniment changes dramatically from one stanza to the next, first illustrating Julia's loneliness through homophonic chords, then recalling her joy as a young bride through active sixteenth-note figuration, and finally illustrating her husband's slow steps through heavy, plodding chords. The heartless jailer in "The Goaler" [sic] exhibits a scornful cruelty that seems to make him responsible for the imprisoned woman's plight. Again, the variations in Abrams's keyboard accompaniment from one stanza to the next give the song an immediacy that furthers the Gothic objective of bringing readers, performers, and listeners into close contact with the terrifying Other.

In some respects, "The Eolian Harp" appears out of place in Abrams's 1803 collection. The only song that introduces a degree of vocal virtuosity, it seems, from a musical perspective, more closely aligned with Abrams's Metastasian music of the 1780s (Ex. 9). The poem is an address to the Aeolian harp, an instrument that became especially popular in the eighteenth century for its purportedly "natural" means of generating music: when left in the wind, it seems to "play itself" through sympathetic resonances, thus attaining a quasi-magical aura that endowed it with beauty while also teaching people how to sympathize with one another. As Carmel Raz has noted, in the nineteenth century, the aeolian harp "evok[ed] distinct neurophysiological theories of interpersonal sympathy while simultaneously serving as a central symbol of Romantic subjectivity in poetry, literature, and philosophy."[55] The idealized resonances between nature and the soul found their counterpart in the idealized sympathy between human beings that the poetry in Abrams collection seeks to provoke. The 1803 *Songs* reframes the Aeolian harp, despite the song's seemingly antique musical style.

In the context of the Gothic, however, the Aeolian harp assumed a new aspect, in that it resonated with the Gothic interest in the otherworldly and the supernatural. As Isabella van Elferen points out, Gothic writers often reveled in the apparent disconnect between sound and physical presence—a point that resonates with both "The Eolian Harp" and with "Echo," another of Abrams's 1803 *Songs*:

> An important part of the spectral effect of sound and music is determined by their ambiguous performative relation with physicality. Sonic phenomena require material contact with sound generators from vocal [cords] to violin strings in order to come into being, and receivers from the body of a violin to ears in order to be heard: but

[55] Carmel Raz, "'The Expressive Organ Within Us': Ether, Ethereality, and Early Romantic Ideas about Music and the Nerves," *19th-Century Music* 38, no. 2 (2014): 116.

simultaneously, sound also depends on the much less material qualities of air waves and of interpretative reception. This im/materiality of sound, moreover, also has a temporal dimension. As the phenomenon of echo illustrates, a sound can survive its physical origin both in duration and reach. Echo suggests physical presence but is disconnected from it like a phantom doppelgänger of its former self, temporally removed from it and therefore fundamentally out of joint. . . . The sounds and music in Gothic novels may *or may not* emanate from a material source, and it is precisely this ambiguity . . . that gives them their ghostly ring.[56]

42
No dis - cor - dance shall de - form thy soft Me - lan - cho - ly
p

45
string every harsh and ruf - fling storm sweeps a -

48
way thy powers to sing

[56] Isabella van Elferen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 25.

Example 9 Harriett Abrams, "The Eolian Harp," mm. 42–52, poetry by J[oseph?] Atkinson, from *Songs* (1803)

As in "The Eolian Harp," an antique aesthetic governs the last song in the collection, "A Ballad of the Eighteenth Century," set to a text by Anne Home Hunter. Set on a moonlit night, the poem describes a madwoman who breaks free of her chains and appears at the banquet being held in the castle where she has been imprisoned. Hunter's poem had been published in 1802 in a version occupying no fewer than 20 stanzas. Abrams's setting includes only eight of these, and variants in the text suggest either that she was been working from a different version—perhaps even one given to her by the poet, whom she may have known—or that she made these variants herself. The starkest variants occur in the final stanza of the song:

Excerpt from Anne Home Hunter, "A Ballad of the Eighteenth Century," in *Poems, by Mrs. John Hunter* (London: T. Payne, 1802), 86–90	Excerpt from the text used in Harriett Abrams, "A Ballad of the Eighteenth Century," in *Songs* (1803)
[…] **Stanza 14:** Ah! See they weep; I cannot weep! Frown not, nor look unkind; That gentle pity sheds her balm To sooth my troubled mind. […] **Stanza 18:** But hark! Methinks a distant bell Low warns me to attend,	[Consecutive stanzas occupying the last verse of music in Abrams's setting:] And do you weep? I cannot weep. Frown not nor look unkind, That gentle pity sheds her balm, To sooth my troubled mind. But stop! Methinks yon distant bell Now warns me to attend,

Where the last gleam of parting hope	Where the last gleam of parting hope
Marks out a kinder friend.	Marks out a kinder friend.

In Hunter's published poem, "they" who weep in Stanza 14 seem to be the guests at the banquet who hear her raving. The version set by Abrams employs direct address—"And do you weep?"—in a manner that seems to break the fourth wall; in performance, the singer would appear to address her audience directly. If so, the speaker's story becomes immediately relevant and relatable by her listeners. They are not silently reading about this madwoman, this outsider, but confronting her face-to-face in a social setting that mirrors their own. Thus, in performance, the singer's persona has the potential to elide with that of the speaker in the poem—a madwoman, an outsider.

Abrams's musical setting enhances the antique effects of the poem. She sets her first stanza in ¢, but thereafter, the time signature shifts to $\frac{3}{2}$, and the rest of the song is notated primarily in half notes, evoking a *stile antico* notational style (Ex. 10). This unusual notation, unique in the volume, underscores the sense of alienation felt by the subject of the ballad: she is "most unlook'd for" and "most unwelcome.

Andante

From the__ dark_ Cells where hor - ror reigns,

4

p

And dire dis-trac-tion bides____ A hap - less Man - iac burst her

7

chains And thro' the Por - tal glides,

10

loose Were her robes.

Example 10 Harriett Abrams, "A Ballad of the Eighteenth Century," mm. 1–11, poetry by Anne Home Hunter, in *Songs* (1803)

With its title reaching back to the past, and its antique musical notation, the song gives the impression that its subject has been imprisoned as a madwoman for many years; she is, perhaps, an older, madder Crazy Jane. In fact, Crazy Jane's words ("Why, fair maid, in every feature / Are such signs of fear expressed? / Can a wand'ring, wretched creature / With such terror fill thy breast?") would seem to be equally relevant to the singer of "A Ballad of the Eighteenth Century." While Lewis encountered Crazy Jane outdoors, the speaker of Hunter's "A Ballad of the Eighteenth Century" has found her way into the banquet hall; the madwoman has broken free and imposed herself on polite society. So, too, Abrams's singer adopts the persona of an outsider in her own parlor—one of the many outsiders represented in the 1803 *Songs*. Like the Wandering Jew, Crazy Jane is a "wand'ring, wretched creature"; equally wretched, homeless, alienated, and othered, is the madwoman who had wasted away, imprisoned in her own castle.

In this context, it may be significant that Anne Hunter's poem, in its 1802 printed edition, is preceded by a line from Shakespeare's *Othello*, specifically one drawn from Othello's final speech, in which he laments his murder of Desdemona:

> We speak –
> ……. "of one whose hand,
> Like the base indian, throws a pearl away,
> richer than all his tribe."
> SHAKESPEAR.[57]

This version of Othello's speech is drawn from the First Quarto and is the version normally preferred by modern editors. In the First Folio, however, the word "Indian" is replaced by "Iudean," meaning "Judean."[58] In this reading, the text refers not to someone from the Americas or West Indies, but to the flawed Jewish King Herod, who murdered his own wife, and whom many Jews reviled for forcing the Jews to adopt Roman customs.[59] The "Iudean" or "Judean" variant was known during the eighteenth century, and Hunter and Abrams could well have encountered it, whether in an edition of the play or in a volume of excerpts.[60] If so, it seems possible that Hunter—and Abrams after her—may have intended the "Indian" epigraph to refer quietly to the Jews in British society. In this case, the madwoman at the center of Hunter's poem and Abrams's song could stand for any Jew—perhaps especially a Jewish woman—who has been shunted aside by a society that rejects the Jews as outsiders.

Conclusion

Jewish conversion in late eighteenth-century Britain, often undertaken for pragmatic reasons rather than (exclusively) affective ones, was not necessarily a decisive act that effected a full break with Judaism or the Jewish community. I have offered a reading of Harriett Abrams's *Songs* of 1803 that suggests that, even after her baptism in 1791, she continued to grapple with the status of social outsiders in ways that call attention to the ambivalent, tenuous position of British Jews. She went out of her way to create musical settings of poetry by Gothic writers and that used Gothic imagery and tropes, developing a musical poetics of the Gothic that brought amateur women musicians into contact with the threatening others of Gothic literature.

Although Abrams's *Songs* do not mention Jews explicitly, the figure of the Wandering Jew may be detected as a prototype for many of the Gothic outsiders

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[57] Anne Home Hunter, "A Ballad of the Eighteenth Century," in *Poems, by Mrs. John Hunter* (London: T. Payne, 1802), 86.

[58] Richard S. Veit, "'Like the Base Judean': A Defense of an Oft-Rejected Reading in *Othello*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 466–69.

[59] Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Roman Domination: The Jewish Revolt and the Destruction of the Second Temple," in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999), 265–98.

[60] The variant "Iudean," along with a long discussion of its merits and deficiencies, can be found, for example, in William Shakespeare, *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, ed. George Steevens and Samuel Johnson (London: C. Bathurst et al., 1773), 10:515–19.

represented in the volume. From the immigrant Nanine at the opening of the volume to the madwoman in "A Ballad of the Eighteenth Century" at the volume's close, Abrams's *Songs* brought singers and their audiences face to face with modern manifestations of the Wandering Jew; in the final song, Abrams's identity as an outsider may be understood to elide with that of the poem's speaker. Abrams's apparent engagement with the figure of the Wandering Jew represented a challenge to a society that prided itself on its openness and tolerance even as it continued to view Jews with suspicion and treat them with contempt.