Reading Jewish Identity, Spiritual Alienation, and Reform Judaism
Through the Veil of Abstract Self-Hatred, Racial Degeneration, and Anti-Semitism in Julia Frankau’s *Dr. Phillips: A Maida Vale Idyll*

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Abstract

The extant historiography has analyzed fin de siècle Anglo-Jewish writer Julia Frankau’s *Dr. Phillips: A Maida Vale Idyll* as an example of Jewish self-hatred that activates themes of anti-Semitism, anti-intellectualism, hereditary degeneration, and scientific racism. But these are not the only ways to read Frankau’s novel. Alternatively, this paper will argue that the anti-religious thematic of *Dr. Phillips* is a product of Anglo-Reform Judaism’s conservatism in light of the “Woman Question” and the movement’s inability to implement the radical feminist proposals of the early German Reformers. We will see in this rereading of *Dr. Phillips* the unique ways in which the failure of Reform Judaism in England contributed to Frankau’s acculturation and to the extensive critique of her former coreligionists, the tradition she had once observed, and the community of her youth.

Julia Frankau, nee Davis (1863-1916), or by her pseudonym, Frank Danby, was an Anglo-Jewish author of both fiction and non-fiction. Indeed, Frankau produced numerable essays for the *Saturday Review*, a plethora of novels, including *A Babe in Bohemia* (1889), *Pigs in Clover* (1903), *The Sphinx’s Lawyer* (1906), *Joseph in Jeopardy* (1912), and *Twilight* (1916); along with several expositions devoted to her passion for engraving.¹ Her most infamous novel, however, *Dr. Phillips: A Maida Vale Idyll* (1887), has received by far the most scholarly attention of any book in her corpus.² The novel is, according to Bryan Cheyette, “a negative discussion of Jewish reality”;³ an expose of upper-middle-class Anglo-Jewry as a retrogressive, materialist tribe.⁴ For Todd Endelman, likewise, Frankau’s narrative is “an unflattering portrait” through which Jews are portrayed as “repugnant.”⁵ Moreover, Michael Galchinsky analyses the book as a form of scientific racism, stemming from Jewish self-hatred and validating anti-Semitism;⁶ while Nadia Valman argues that *Dr. Phillips* is an ethnographic novel that references French naturalism, Émile Zola, and themes of hereditary degeneration and prostitution, anti-science, and anti-intellectualism.⁷ Certainly, the extant historiography is right to note Frankau’s criticism of upper-middle-class Anglo-Jewry, the...
social Darwinist undertones, even the anti-Semitic themes, although the process behind
Frankau’s estrangement from the community has been completely overlooked. What is more,
Frankau’s alienation from organized Anglo-Jewry, its religious and communal organization,
seems to have a religio-spiritual, rather than a racist, foundation. In fact, prior to the
publication of Dr. Phillips, Frankau had been both socially and culturally integrated into the
Jewish community; though as we will see, a dispute with the synagogue authorities in 1885
was merely the focal point of her rift with Anglo-Reform Judaism and its affluent West End
community. The challenge this article presents is for readers to look beyond the extant
scholarship, and Frankau’s blatant aversion for upper-middle-class Anglo-Jewry, and to
reveal an original understanding and new contextual perspective through which Dr. Phillips
might be interpreted.

This type of research is hardly novel (no pun intended). Until the late-1990s, another
nineteenth-century Anglo-Jewish poet and novelist, Amy Levy, was similarly misunderstood.
Indeed, her magnum opus, Reuben Sachs (1888), was for over a century derided by the
Jewish community and literary critics alike as a work of anti-Semitism, or at best, as an
example of Jewish self-hatred. In the 1990s, however, several scholars, most notably Meri-
Jane Rochelson, were able to clearly demonstrate that not only had the novel’s feminist
implications been overlooked, that, most importantly, Reuben Sachs was neither a work of
anti-Semitism, or Jewish self-hatred, nor did it evidence a hatred of Judaism. There is little
space or requirement to elaborate further, though needless to say, Julia Frankau scholarship
might yet be subject to further revision. Moreover, before continuing, we might remember
that the narrative voice of a novel, the narrator, and their prejudices, idiosyncrasies, and
milieu, are installed by the author, though are not necessarily a personal, historical, or
biographical reflection of the author.

Dr. Phillips: A Maida Vale Idyll is a mud-streaked window into a minute pocket of
upper-middle-class, assimilated Anglo-Jewry, and not, as some would assume, a
condemnation of the Jewish community en masse. The protagonist, Dr. Benjamin Phillips, is
as charismatic, sensual, and mysterious as he is sinister, avaricious, and calculating. His

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practice is frequented by Jewish patients and he is the focus of the materialist, superficial Jewish milieu that surrounds him. Dr. Phillips, however, is a dilettante: he has little time for his moneyed, though barren, wife, and instead showers his affection on his gentile mistress, the beautiful Mary Cameron, who he intends to marry. She is also the unacknowledged mother of his child, baby Nita. The cost of maintaining his lifestyle, however, is insurmountable. Dr. Phillip’s, seeking to resolve his financial quandary, murders his wife, injecting her with an overdose of morphine while she recovers from an operation to remove an ovarian tumour: “A few quick, quiet deft movements of the slender nervous hands about the arm that lay on the counterpane. It was heavy, almost like a dead arm, but warm and soft and white, save for one little mark.” Meanwhile, the mistress he longs for has grown to despise him. Instead, Mary hopes to marry a younger man heir to his uncle’s estate. The murder, therefore, is in vein. When the Maida Vale Jewish community discover Dr. Phillip’s extramarital affair, he is exiled for all time. His beloved daughter, Nita, has died, rendering him emotionally anaesthetized. Unshackled from his family responsibilities, and the watchful stare of the gossipy Maida Vale community, Dr. Phillip’s is let loose on the medical world:

The rage for surgical interference which is overriding the Pharmacopoeia, and demoralizing the physicians of today, has no keener champion that Benjamin Phillips. A terrible curiosity to unveil the mysteries of nature, and absolute disregard for human life, characterize the surgeon whose magisterial aphorism to his pupils runs:- “When in doubt, operate; you may save life, you are certain to acquire knowledge.” … Benjamin Phillips lives to carry on his work, to unsex woman and maim men; to be a living testimony of manual dexterity and moral recklessness. He is the idol of his clinic, the prophet of the new school; his name is in all men’s mouths, and he can ably defend himself with pen and tongue against the reproaches and attacks of his more timorous or more conscientious brethren.

The Jewish men and women of the Maida Vale enclave are portrayed throughout as “untidy-looking,” materialistic, obsessed with card playing, “ungainly,” tribalistic, awkward, crass, “dark,” “socially ambitious,” with “black eyes,” “stooping,” insular, and culturally retrogressive: “All the burning questions of the hour are to them a dead letter; art, literature and politics exist not for them. They have but one aim, the acquisition of wealth.” Indeed, the opening scene of Dr. Phillips sets the materialistic tone:
The staircase was hung with Gobelins tapestry, vases on malachite pedestals stood on the landing, and on entering the drawing-room your feet were surprised by the softness of the carpets. There were gilt chairs and satin draperies; marble figures upheld the red-shaded lamps; exquisite china lay on inlaid tables. The clock on the mantelpiece was a work of art. But this large and beautiful house was filled with the floating suggestions of a Bond Street showroom; the furniture looked as if it were on view.14

Socially, culturally, and physically, the Maida Vale milieu is narrow-minded, ill-educated, and physically revolting. According to Nadia Valman, Dr. Phillips employs the discourse of “racial gothic”; the malevolent physician whose predatory sexuality is equalled only by that of his calculating mistress, Mary Cameron, who is embittered by her own financial deprivation. Through a framework of exploitation she is drawn into the Doctor’s depraved world; though he too is exploited. Dr. Phillips’ immorality and wanton ambition are figured as the product of the Jewish community that will ultimately abandon him.15 The satirising of Jewish financial ambition and materialist culture in Dr. Phillips, however, is perhaps not unexpected, as Todd Endelman points out, and not without a modicum of truth. Endelman:

In all fairness, there was a kernel of truth in what she [Frankau] said. Maida Vale was nouveau riche in the literal sense of the term. Most middle-class Jews at this time were not well-educated or inclined to take an interest in art, literature, or science. Nor was Frankau alone in attributing to English Jewry an excessive devotion to card-playing. Among others, the Rev. Simeon Singer of the Bayswater Synagogue, who could hardly be described as a self-hating Jew, though the community was “far too much addicted to card-playing as the one unfailing resource to kill the demon of ennui [boredom].”16

It is hardly surprising that the publication of Dr. Phillips brought scathing reviews and shame on Frankau, particularly from Jewish circles; though barely years earlier, Frankau herself had been an active member of the upper-middle-class community, its social life, and its synagogue.

The Davis family belonged to the recently founded, highly fashionable, West London Synagogue of British Jews on Upper Berkeley Street. Despite its Reform affiliation, Todd Endelman argues, the synagogue was conservative in ritual and theology, and middle-class Jewry, in general, was more observant than its coreligionists in Germany and the United States. The children of the Davis family, including Julia, recited prayers daily, attended synagogue, and were educated at the Orthodox Belisario School.17 Miriam Mendes Belisario

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was primarily a teacher of the Sephardic (Jews descended from the Iberian Peninsula) community. She was also the author of *Sabbath Evenings at Home* (1856), which outlines the Jewish faith. According to Eliza Aria (nee Davis), the sister of Julia, Belisario was a rigid disciplinarian, specifically with regards to religious training:

> Our daily school, where boys and girls were received, was conducted by a Miss Belisario, and under her guidance many Jews, Jessels, Mocattas, Sebags, and Montefiores, all present-time magnets, took with us their first lessons. Miss Belisario was a Jewess of the most rigid kind, a severe disciplinarian regarding the traditions of our faith as sacrosanct, and incidentally allotting to me a prize for reciting the ten commandments in Hebrew. I wish now that I could remember them to faithful observance even in English. “Young ladies, don’t laugh but say the blessing,” she would urge with uplifted hand when she entered the classroom.

If Julia’s religious schooling was strict, it was little different at home. Aria: “our early morning prayers, ritual never omitted, for we were reared strictly in the Jewish faith.” Julia married Arthur Frankau, who had attended a Jewish school in Frankfurt, at the Reform synagogue (he became a member a month earlier). In 1884, after the birth of their son, Gilbert, the wardens of the synagogue ordered that they have him circumcised. Angered, Arthur resigned his membership in 1885. Such was his aversion to the tradition, even Reform Judaism, he instructed that on his death, his body was not to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Gilbert was raised in the Church of England (from the age of thirteen), allegedly unaware of his Jewish background until the age of sixteen.

Once the decision had been made to cancel their synagogue membership there was no going back. Indeed, the Upper Berkeley Street synagogue was unique; the only Reform synagogue in London at the time. Anglo-Reformism was not, as we will see, a success. It was of no interest to the East European immigrants arriving in England in the 1880s; neither was it able to attract native Jews from the union of Orthodox synagogues, the United Synagogue. Efforts to found Reform synagogues in Briston (Norfolk) and Clapham (south London) in the 1870s failed, and the Upper Berkeley Street synagogue remained the only one of its type in London. In addition, synagogue attendance was at an all time low. Stephen Sharot:

> If a low level of synagogue of synagogue attendance is taken as an index of secularization, the members of the West London Synagogue were among the most secular

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seatholders in London: the synagogue did not hold daily services, and regrets about low Sabbath attendances were regularly expressed at the annual seatholders’ meetings. The British Weekly religious poll, in 1886, recorded 81 worshippers on the Sabbath morning at the Reform synagogue; that represented the smallest attendance, proportional to seatholders, among all the synagogues recorded by the census.23

The Reform service was little different from the Orthodox synagogues, and the more radical influence of German Reform Judaism did not take hold until the 1930s.24 Hence, the Frankau’s, certainly unwilling to join the Orthodox congregation, though unable to rejoin the Reform synagogue given their moral objection to circumcision, and the unfolding furore, were left, for the time being, without a religious affiliation. Indeed, the practice of circumcision, despite the criticism of Reform advocates such as Abraham Geiger, was not abolished in any synagogue. According to Todd Endelman, “Frankau’s role placed him outside the pale of institutional Judaism … No Reform synagogue, synod, or congregational association in Europe or America ever claimed that it was not religiously binding.”25 Even Geiger, who described circumcision as a “gory rite,” recognised it as a time-honoured ritual.26

Problematically, the issue of circumcision, and Arthur Frankau’s stubborn rejection of the Jewish tradition, however, does not explain the wholesale suppression of the family’s Jewish heritage and religious affiliation, nor does it account for Julia’s willingness to exile herself, and castigate, the community of her youth. Indeed, there are several more compelling factors that might explain Julia Frankau’s departure from the synagogue, and Jewish communal life; these are evident in Dr. Phillips.

Firstly: anti-materialism. The “card-table” abounds throughout Julia Frankau’s novel: “The red light played on the money, on the cards, on the diamonds, on eager faces and grasping fingers. The play went on almost in silence; no light jest or merry quip, no sacrilegious sound of laughter disturbed the devotion of Judaism to its living God.”27 Certainly, the narrator associates the Judaism of the upper-middle-class with avaricious materialism:

Many religions have their days upon the earth, have been born and exalted, whether in the stable or on the Mount, but the great Single Deity, the “I am the Lord thy God, and thou
shall have no other,” that binds Judaism together, is as invincible now as it was when Moses had to destroy the Golden Calf on Mount Horeb. And that Deity is Gain.28

The synagogue at Upper Berkeley Street maintained an upper and upper-middle-class character throughout the Victorian period. The leaders of the Reform synagogue were drawn from the same Anglo-Jewish “aristocracy” as the Orthodox synagogues. The price of seats in the Orthodox congregations were so high that the Jewish middle-class was all but excluded from membership, along with the estranged working-class. Similar to the European Jewish communities, the leadership of the synagogues was made up of wealthy merchants, bankers, and professionals.29 Nadia Valman notes that by the close of the nineteenth-century, the Anglo-Jewish press, along with religious officials, and authors, were univocal in their condemnation of the community’s rampant materialism. Hermann Adler (the Chief Rabbi), for example, complained that the mental horizon of West End Jewry did not stretch beyond that of the card-table.30 In Dr. Phillips, the corruptive materialism of the Maida Vale clique is a product of their primeval faith in the “Deity of Gain,” though the narrator does not necessarily condemn traditional Judaism per se; after all, Moses did destroy the Golden Calf it is noted.31 Conversely, it is the community, and its watchful glare, that is able, partially, to keep Dr. Phillips’ more sinister machinations in check,32 though for the Christian, Mary Cameron, Judaism equates to social exclusion. Indeed, Florrie, in her naivety, speculates that her Gentile lover might convert to Judaism, only for Mary to cynically respond: “‘Good heavens! do you think a white man would consent to go about with his face permanently blacked?’”33 Dr. Phillips is essentially good, though is infected by the ambitious milieu he inhabits; his Jewish ancestry, and the drive for success, make him particularly susceptible to immorality: “This was the zenith of Benjamin’s destiny. Much that was good in the man – and, perhaps, but for his race training and instincts, all would have been good – was prominent at this time.”34 According to Michael Galchinsky, the novel implies that there are unassailable biological differences between Jew and Gentile.35 Dr. Phillips:

In a sort of jealous exclusiveness these Jews lived by and among themselves. They fancied they did so from choice. It was not so: it was a remnant of the time when the yellow cap and curiously-shaped gabardine marked them out as lepers in the crowd.
garb had been discarded, but the shrinking feeling of generations was still lingering. There is a certain pride in these people; they are at once the creatures and the outcasts of civilisation. The difference between Jew and Gentile was once one of religion. Now it is a difference that it will take as many centuries of extermarriage to overcome as it has taken centuries of intermarriage to bring about. The Jews feel this acutely. They remember the leper mark that has been taken from them, and they shrink from accentuating the remembrance by association with the people whose ancestors affixed it.

Frankau’s storyteller applies the abstract terms of race, culture, and religion interchangeably. “Race,” for the narrator, although corporeal, rather than being a set of permanent physical characteristics, is perhaps changeable through wholesale social assimilation. Certainly, the Jews “blackness,” as Galchinsky argues, accounts for their moral degeneracy, though is alterable through eugenics. Dr. Phillips: 

Put two strange Jews, one form London and one from the Antipodes, amid a hundred people of other nationalities, and in a quarter of an hour they will have recognised their kinship, and have gravitated towards each other in unconscious Ishmaelitism against the rest of the company. Sections of them are trying very hard to struggle against this race-barrier, and with a modicum of success. But they have much to contend against.

The anti-materialism Frankau ascribes to her narrator that is associated with Anglo-Jewry is figured as a product of their narrow-minded culture and inbreeding, though is resolvable through the mechanics of social Darwinism: the theory that the laws of natural selection, as applied to nature, are also applicable to human society. Certainly, Anglo-Jews might struggle against the “race-barrier.” “The modicum of success” might be autobiographical recognition of Frankau’s own assimilation; while the prospect of “centuries of extermarriage” in order to overcome the burden of Jewish exclusiveness is recognition that there is no such thing as a post-Jewish Jew. Melissa Raphael: “Traditionally, Jewishness is ineradicable because a Jew is one who was born of a Jewish mother. And Jewishness is not a matter of the assent of faith of intellect, but of culture, history, and above all, soul.” Indeed, while Frankau despised the materialism of upper-middle-class Anglo-Jewry, and was glad to leave this community behind, she too was aware that her own Jewish identity, and that of her family’s, was ineradicable. Dr. Phillips: “They [Jews] may try to live as Christians, they cannot but die Jews.” In the second edition of Dr. Phillips Frankau acknowledged that the

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novel was not a wholesale attack on Anglo-Jewry, but a window into “a small and little known section of society before it yields to the influences of advanced civilisation and education”; or as Eliza Aria, who maintained her Jewish identity and would eventually turn to Liberal Judaism, would have it: Dr. Phillips merely: “rattled the skeletons in the cupboards and the stout ladies at the card-tables.”

Secondly, those upper-middle-class Jews, the Frankaus included, who joined the fledgling Reform congregation were unable to accommodate Orthodoxy and its halakhic (legal) minutiae to their anglicised lives; many had done so based on the proposals and pledges of classical German Reformism, although were disappointed to find that Anglo-Reformism was both conservative and slow to initiate the anticipated restructuring. In fact, considerable change was not implemented until the following century; rather, piecemeal alterations, combined with minor reforms to the Orthodox service, actually brought the denominations closer together. Indeed, there was little difference between the Reform and Orthodox leaders as both acted in unison for the Board of Deputies, the Board of Guardians, and the Jewish Religious Education Board. They attended each other’s synagogues during award ceremonies, their beliefs were similar, and they performed the same duties. Anglo-Reform Judaism was characterised by its need for decorum, prayers in the vernacular, regular sermons, its choir, the organ, and the replacement of particularistic prayers with universal ones. The association with classical Reformism was at first manifest: bibliocentrism replaced rabbinic authority, the second day of festivals was duly abolished, the Ten Commandments were restored to the liturgy, and the Hebrew prophets took moral authority over the Pentateuch. The new prayer book, however, did not include any radical changes; those calling for the restoration of the Temple and the coming of the Messiah were retained, while the wearing of prayer shawls and phylacteries continued. Thus, while the services were shorter, being called up was abolished, English sermons were permitted on Shabbat, and the idea of a Messiah was replaced with hope for a universal Messianic age, there was little to choose between the denominations. Orthodox criticism of the Reform synagogue on the grounds of *chukkat ha-goy* (rabbinic prohibition on the adoption of Gentile practices) was
barely sustainable given that the Orthodox service itself had become similar to the Protestant church service. By the mid-nineteenth-century, the Orthodox synagogues had introduced choirs, sermons in the vernacular, a reverent atmosphere, elaborate pulpits, and were using essentially Protestant titles such as warden, guardians, reverend, and vestry.\textsuperscript{49} The resemblances between the denominations made defection from one to the other pointless. Accordingly, there was no sizable defection from the Orthodox community in the 1880s. It is perhaps no surprise that Anglo-Reformers such as Claude Montefiore would seek to develop Liberal Judaism in England as an alternative to the Reform synagogue. In \textit{Dr. Phillips}, however, the prospect of secularism is a welcome substitute:

How wide a vista opened out in the mind of the little Jewish girl, as she lay in the arms of Christianity. How centuries of bigotry and generations of prejudice melted away in the flame of her passion. The spirit of separation that had rolled heavy between her love and herself seemed uplifted. She could see no Judaism and feel no Christianity. Formless visions of light and knowledge floated before her with their vanishing shadows flitting by the azure heavens beyond. It was love, love, nothing but love, and the whole world must be love, now she was of that world of love. He clasped her ever closer, and she floated with him into azure skies, and drifted with him into fathomless seas, and all of love.\textsuperscript{50}

Florrie’s envisaging of a reality unburdened by religious identity seems prophetic, though for Julia Frankau and her husband, the secular life, along with the opportunities of Christian society, seemed to be the only valid option, even more so in light of the “Woman Question.”

Thirdly, the attraction of classical Reformism for assimilated Anglo-Jews, specifically women, was with the proto-feminist pledges of the early nineteenth-century German Reformers who were determined to spiritually reengage women with Judaism – to end, among other things, their sequestering to the gallery, exclusion from the minyan (prayer quorum), and inadmissibility as witnesses. These inequalities were deemed incompatible with Enlightened (\textit{Haskalah}) culture, especially considering women’s essential spiritual role in the home.\textsuperscript{51} At the Reform Conference held in Frankfurt in 1845, Rabbi David Einhorn, Samuel Adler, and A. Adler discussed a number of radical proto-feminist proposals. These were reprinted in a six point resolution for the Breslau conference in 1846. Einhorn argued that women could be allowed to perform the same time-bound commandments (mitzvot)
incumbent on men, that women could be included in the minyan, that women could act as legal witnesses, that the age of religious majority could also be thirteen for girls, and that the exclusionary morning benediction during which Jewish men thank God for not having been made a woman could be abolished. Indeed, while traditional Judaism idealized the Jewish woman as the keeper of the kosher household, and maintainer of the family through her role as simultaneous dutiful wife, doting mother, and educator of small children, and thus integral to Jewish survival, the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, along with the political emancipation of Anglo-Jewry in 1858, encouraged upper-middle-class women to question gender exclusionism in the community. Indeed, traditionally, women were the hidden “Other”; not obligated to regularly attend synagogue, nor permitted to perform the many mitzvot that interfere with domestic duties, they must remain behind the mechitzah curtain, or in the gallery, when attending synagogue. Moreover, they cannot assume positions of communal or religious leadership over men, read aloud from the scroll (Aliyah), or study or be part of the authoritative interpretation of the sacred texts. The rise of the Reform communities, along with assimilation and the counter-attractions of secular society, only exacerbated women’s estrangement from the tradition. Problematically, even the German Reformers were less revolutionary than their rhetoric implied. The innovative proto-feminist proposals of Rabbi Einhorn, and others, were neither debated nor endorsed, and only a selection of German synagogues adopted the ideas. Indeed, the failure of Anglo-Reformism, according to Riv-Ellen Prell, was a product of its devotion to Enlightenment liberalism; by selecting the emancipation model to address gender exclusionism, or by seeking legal equality, the Reformers diminished the unique halakhic status applied to women in the tradition. Thus, as women became equal, they also became invisible. Moreover, although the Anglo-Reformers were aware of the dynamics of women’s spiritual alienation they had little idea, or inclination, as to how to address the problem. Prell: Conceptualizing gender equality for Reformers meant freeing a Jewish woman from her unique legal status. But the only way to understand women thereafter was in terms of the culture in which Reform Jews lived, in which gender equality never existed. Women
persisted in a public religious invisibility that was inexplicable in the face of their “emancipation.” Legal transformation was no solution. At the West London Synagogue, despite the fact that female worshippers often outnumbered the men, it was not until 1896 that women were invited to the meeting of the congregation; even then they were not permitted to vote on resolutions. At the Upper Berkeley Street synagogue all the same gender restrictions associated with Orthodoxy remained, including the sequestering of women to the gallery, their exclusion from the minyan, and the reading of prayers in Hebrew (incomprehensible to the majority of assimilated women). In Dr. Phillips, the narrowness of upper-middle-class Anglo-Jewry, including its “sexual exploitation,” expressed also in its religious values, permeates the text:

There is a society worth describing before, as must be in the natural order of things, it delays or amalgamates. It is a fact little understood that here, in the heart of a great and cosmopolitan city, sharing in, and appropriating its riches, there is a whole nation dwelling apart in an inviolable seclusion, which they at once cultivate, boast of, and are ashamed at. There are houses upon houses in the West Central districts, in Maida Vale, in the City, which are barred to Christians, to which the very name of Jew is an open sesame.

For Julia Frankau, evidently, this section of Anglo-Jewry, their acculturated version of the decaying ancestral faith, their social and moral ethics, are a primordial survival doomed to degeneration and eventual extinction. Indeed, the French literary naturalism Frankau ascribes to her novel is grounded in reality, by stark contrast to the romantic and the supernatural. Social Darwinism abounds as hereditary degeneration adds “scientific” proof, explaining Maida Vale Jewry’s materialistic culture. Central to the naturalistic approach is pessimism, and candid description of a community Frankau no longer desires to be a member of; she glimpsed the intellectual and social freedom of secular society with little intention of reconciliation with the alleged legalism and obscurantism of the Jewish tradition exemplified contemporaneously through both the Orthodox and Reform communities in London.

Another characteristic of French naturalist literary culture is the author’s detachment from the story – their objectivity; along with determinism. For Julia Frankau it is impossible to be withdrawn; she is describing in shapes and forms the community of her youth, her
ancestors, and her current family. The eradication of her ancestral heritage, if we are to assume elements of Dr. Phillips to be autobiographical, is not an easy one:

He [Dr. Phillips] was quite able to criticize his co-religionists with biting humour, but at the bottom of his heart he had the genuine espirit de corps of the People. He loved them; they were his people, and he could not help feeling that it was a privilege to be received among them intimately. These people are bound to each other by so many ties of interest, association, and feeling, that they can never become effectually estranged.

The effacement of Jewish beliefs rarely led to total acceptance in Christian society. Todd Endelman: “Unflattering stereotyped remarks in the press, on the stage, and in literature reflected – as well as reinforced – popular feeling that Jews were, at heart, really not like other Englishmen, no matter how thoroughly anglicized they might appear.”

In the early-Victorian period the climate of “toleration” was central to the philo-Semite aim of converting the Jews through subtle persuasion. Certainly, Jewishness was to become a relic, but the individual was permitted dignity. In return for the Jew’s agreement to shed their religious difference, liberal Christians promised complete assimilation. Jewish women, regarded as latent Protestants given their “maltreatment” in the Jewish tradition, were considered undereducated and ready for conversion.

The London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews, founded in 1809, expressly targeted women. It was intended that spiritual Jewish women, or “Jewish Protestants,” would become the vanguard of Anglo-Jewry’s conversion.

In addition, Jewish women could exercise their natural womanly influence over their families, who, in turn, might also convert. Bryan Cheyette: “The still dominant Christian discourse of ‘transcending’ Judaism was reflected in the liberal quid pro quo of Jewish ‘emancipation’ – the idea that Jews would eventually adopt the dominant values of society after they had become citizens – which was made with some urgency in Victorian Britain.”

According to Cheyette, underneath the idealized Jewish-self who represented the possibility of liberal progress, was a particularist Other who contradicts the promise of emancipation. Indeed, the mass immigration of the 1880s onwards constituted the importation of a distinguishable Yiddish sub-culture which called into question the “liberal fantasy” of a Jew “differing from his neighbor” simply by his personal religious beliefs.
The new arrivals brought with them the social, cultural, and religious insularity of the *shtetl* (small Jewish town), along with a stubborn refusal to assimilate. Native Anglo-Jews, by contrast, were feeling the effects of secularization, religious indifference and skepticism. The majority of acculturated Anglo-Jews identified themselves primarily as English, viewing their attachment to Judaism merely as a social marker. Many native-born Jews opposed Zionism, while the Anglo-Jewish aristocracy no longer considered itself part of an exclusive community. Social contact with Gentiles was common and some Anglo-Jews felt no association with their co-religionists. The strongest social ties for most Anglo-Jews were with fellow British citizens. Young Jewish men and women involved in elementary, secondary, and university education were introduced to Darwinism, biblical criticism, and the study of comparative religions, including Christianity, while, in contrast, Jewish religious practice was in decline and indifference to Jewish learning was extensive. As a young woman, Frankau was introduced to an exciting world beyond the community. Indeed, through her brother James she became acquainted with Oscar Wilde. The association, along with a parody of his work, led to the beginning of her career as an author.

As we have seen, Julia Frankau’s estrangement from the Jewish community began with her husband’s dispute with the synagogue, although the effacing of her ancestry and religion was more than simply an issue with circumcision. Indeed, Frankau’s anti-materialism, the failure of the Reform synagogue to implement meaningful change, the similarity between Anglo-Reformism and Orthodoxy, Reform Judaism’s conservative approach to the “Woman Question,” along with the process of secularization and the counter-attractions of Christian society; these factors all contributed to her exile. Frankau would forever be like the Jews of her novel, *Dr. Phillips: A Maida Vale Idyll*: “socially ambitious: they belonged to that class of Jews who see in every Christian a probable ‘swell,’ in every Jew a direct descendant of an old clothesman or a hawker.”
ENDNOTES


2 Julia Frankau [Frank Danby, pseud.], *Dr. Phillips; A Maid in Idyll* (London: Vizetelly, 1887).


10 Eliza Aria (Julia’s sister) had a daughter named Nita.

11 Frankau, *Dr. Phillips*, 276.


13 Frankau, *Dr. Phillips*, 6, 7, 9, 11, 55, 82, 168.

14 Frankau, *Dr. Phillips*, 5.


28 Frankau, *Dr. Phillips*, 15.


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64 Galchinsky, “Modern Jewish Women’s Dilemmas,” 30.
65 Cheyette, “The Other Self,” 98.
69 Frankau, Dr. Phillips, 9.

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