



Benjamin Disraeli (Jewish Encounters Series)

Adam Kirsch

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A dandy, a best-selling novelist, and a man of political and sexual intrigue, Benjamin Disraeli was one of the most captivating figures of the nineteenth century. His flirtation with proto-Zionism, his ideas about power and empire, and his fantasies about the Middle East remain prophetically relevant today. How a man who was born a Jew--and who remained in the eyes of his countrymen a member of a despised minority--managed to become prime minister of England seems even today nothing short of miraculous.

In this compelling biography, renowned poet and critic Adam Kirsch looks at Disraeli as a novelist as well as a statesman, recognizing that the outsider Jew who became one of the world's most powerful men was his own greatest character. Though baptized by his father at the age of twelve, Disraeli was seen--and saw himself--as a Jew. But he created an idea of Jewishness to rival the British notion of aristocracy.

Disraeli was a figure of fascinating contradictions: an archconservative who benefited from England's liberal attitudes, a baptized Christian who saw Jewishness as a matter of racial superiority, a perennial outsider who dreamed of glory for England, which, in the words of one contemporary, became for Disraeli "the Israel of his imagination."

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