‘The Jew’ in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture
Between the East End and East Africa
Edited by Eitan Bar-Yosef and Nadia Valman
6

Jews, Englishmen, and Folklorists: The Scholarship of Joseph Jacobs and Moses Gaster

Simon Rabinovitch

Between 1870 and 1910, English interest in folk literature and customs expanded dramatically, and became increasingly organized, scholarly, and influenced by emerging anthropological theories. Building on the foundations created by earlier British collectors and enthusiasts, a small group of private scholars founded the Folk-Lore Society in 1878 (the first of its kind anywhere), which attempted to apply more rigorous and scholarly methods to the study of folklore, and to create what one founder, George Laurence Gomme, called a ‘science of folklore’. The new science was based on the application of biological and anthropological evolutionary theories to the study of folklore, and in particular, E. H. Tylor’s doctrine of survivals, which claimed it possible to identify, in the cultures of non-primitive societies, customary survivals from earlier stages of cultural development. Members of the Folk-Lore Society debated amongst themselves whether folklore should be considered a branch of anthropology or independent of it, but they all viewed folklore through the lens of evolutionary theories.

English folklore studies during this period were pursued mainly by Victorian gentlemen of varied professions who in their spare time devoted themselves to advancing their humanistic interests. Even considering that most were primarily concerned with British customs and traditions, the nationalist undertones prevalent in anthropology and folkloristics as practiced on the Continent at the time were comparatively muted in England. That two Jewish newcomers to the country, Joseph Jacobs (1854–1916) and Moses Gaster (1856–1939), could gain acceptance in English society through contributions in this field is evidence that being a Victorian gentleman was not limited to Englishmen only. At a time of increasing resistance to East European immigration to England, the manner in which Jacobs and Gaster’s very different approaches to folklore and anthropology also illustrate how elite Jews sought to reveal to the general population what Jacobs called, in the title of one of his books, Jewish
 Contributions to Civilization. By analysing the late-Victorian and Edwardian folkloristic and anthropological scholarship of Joseph Jacobs and Moses Gaster, this chapter examines how two integrated and prosperous London Jews viewed their new immigrant brethren, their English colleagues, and their own roles in the world of English culture and scholarship. The scholarly work of each reflects two very different approaches to how one could (or should) strive to be both Jewish and English, demonstrating the uses and limitations of folklore and anthropology for gaining acceptance in English society.

Joseph Jacobs: an English folklorist in late-Victorian England

Joseph Jacobs moved from Australia to England in order to attend St John's College, in Cambridge, as one of the first Jews to enter that university after the Statute Law Revision Act of 1863. Despite having been a highly regarded student, Jacobs was not offered a fellowship after receiving his Bachelor of Arts. It is impossible to know whether this was due to existing parlour antisemitism at Cambridge, but as a result of Jacobs's failure to find a full-time appointment at a university, he was forced to diversify his literary interests and take on numerous editorial, journalistic, and literary posts to support himself.

After gaining his Bachelor of Arts from Cambridge, but before becoming a widely published folklorist, Jacobs spent several years engaged in studying, anthropologically, the physical characteristics of the Jews in England. Large-scale Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe began in 1881, and with it came a debate over the value of such immigrants to England, with increasing attention paid to the subject in the English press. While anti-Jewish sentiment certainly existed in England, especially among opponents of Jewish immigration, political antisemitism on the Continent during the same period was much more explicit and increasingly based on supposedly scientific grounds. In an effort to combat racial antisemitism and refute scientifically the claims of those who argued that the Jews were biologically inferior to other Europeans, Jacobs became an amateur anthropologist, and in his spare time undertook several studies of comparative anthropometry, using the Jews in England as his subject.

Possibly in order to pre-empt racial science from being employed by anti-Jewish and anti-immigrant forces in England, Jacobs created a Jewish race science which aimed to prove that the new Jewish arrivals who lived in London's East End, while deficient in some ways, would adapt and eventually become as English as the members of the longer-standing Jewish community in the West End. One method of doing so was proving that both sets of Jews belonged to the same race, and in Jacobs's article for the Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, entitled 'On the Racial Characteristics of Modern Jews', he articulated his view that the Jews are a unified yet separate and even pure racial type. Jacobs was even willing to accept that certain physical deficiencies were apparent in contemporary Jewry, but these deficiencies were in Jacobs's opinion social, not racial, in their causes, and therefore rectifiable. Jacobs explained differences between the Jews and the general population as resulting from both European imposed isolation and Judaic practices, both of which had positive and negative consequences on Jewish physical development. Jacobs tested many of his hypotheses in his study 'On the Comparative Anthropometry of English Jews' by collecting anthropometric measurements for Englishmen, as well as two classes of Jews he bluntly described as 'the better nurtured inhabitants of the West End and descendants for the most part of Jews who have been long settled in this country' and 'the less fortunately situated Jewish dwellers at the East End, the parents of whom in many cases were born abroad'. Jacobs's study and carefully-crafted charts concluded that English Jews compared unfavourably in almost all anthropological measurements (for example, height, arm-span, and keenness of sight) with his English subjects. Nevertheless, when one isolates the statistics for the West End Jews who, according to Jacobs, 'were probably of very nearly the same class' as his English subjects — 'the inferiority vanishes almost entirely'. As the West End Jews, according to Jacobs, were unquestionably of the same race as the East End Jews, then logically, any racial deficiencies prevalent among Jews at the time were the result of nurture, not nature.

In attempting to demonstrate Jewish racial parity with the European population, Jacobs even published his own 'Distribution of Jewish Ability' — based on Francis Galton's equivalent for Englishmen — in which he compiled a list of prominent people of Jewish descent in order to prove that Jews had produced at least as many geniuses per million as other European races. Jacobs's 'Distribution of Jewish Ability', as well as his cultural and racial anthropology, focused on refuting the increasingly popular notion that Jews themselves, as opposed to just their religion, were inherently deficient and therefore incapable of integration into European society. But as part of his participation in the anthropological discussion, Jacobs conceded, or even emphasized, two important points: that the Jews are a pure race, unconnected to European stock, and that contemporary Jewry did possess some deleterious qualities. These two points were not unconnected, as Jacobs could argue that the Jewish race had the capability of becoming as great as European races, if not greater, while simultaneously pushing Jews — in particular 'East End' (read East European) Jews — to reform themselves. Jacobs thereby employed the theories of the anthropologist E. B. Tylor (integrating them with those of Darwin and Galton) to explain what he perceived to be the evident disparity between Western and Eastern European Jews in their cultural and physical evolution. Tylor frequently spoke of human cultural development in terms of 'mental evolution', and Jacobs applied a similar
logic in arguing that the maintenance of supposedly primitive cultural traditions by East European Jews continued to stunt their evolution both culturally and physically.

As an editor and major contributor to the Jewish Chronicle and an important figure in the Mansion House Fund established to aid Jewish victims of Russian persecution, Jacobs toiled tirelessly on behalf of East European Jewry, both reporting on the situation in the tsarist empire and helping in the resettlement of new immigrants. Jacobs, however, did not attempt to cloak his disdain for the many elements of East European Jewish culture he considered harmful – marriage practices being a favourite target. In his belief in the backwardness of much of traditional East European Jewish culture, Jacobs reflected typical Central and West European Jewish attitudes toward the Ostjuden; but Jacobs was especially emphatic in his desire to Westernise these Jews. As John Eron has observed, for Jacobs, the Jews of England were the ideal model for modern Jewry to follow, and therefore the customs of Anglo-Jewry should become the standard by which East European Jewry should model itself. Eron even suggests that Jacobs wanted English Jewry to perform a similar ‘civilizing mission’ among other Jews, as England had undertaken among its Empire’s subjects. The paradox of Jacobs (and Jewish race science in general) was that a discipline that emerged in reaction to the increasing antisemitism in anthropology and medicine still separated the scientist (in this case a West End Jew) from his subject (East End Jewry) and maintained the existence of ideal types.

Despite the recognition he received through his publications in the Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, racial anthropology was Jacobs’s secondary interest to a related discipline, folkloristics, through which he derived employment by writing widely circulated publications. As Tyler’s doctrine of survivals made European folklore the main source for data supporting his evolutionary theory of uniform cultural development, the creation of the English Folk-Lore Society provided an arena for Tylerian scholars such as Jacobs to focus their intellectual energies. Between 1888 and 1895, Jacobs committed himself to the collection and publication of British and other folklore. Within that period, Jacobs collected, edited, and published half a dozen volumes of English and Celtic folklore, as well as other folklore from Europe and India, in addition to being one of the founding members of the English Folk-Lore Society, the sole editor of the official publication of the Folk-Lore Society, Folk-Lore, as well as a major contributor until he resigned in 1893 because of other commitments.

By the time of his resignation from Folk-Lore, Jacobs had riled many members of the Folk-Lore Society, in particular by not accepting the prevailing folkloristic concept of popular creativity. While the field of folkloristics in England was not as inclined to nationalist romanticism as its equivalent German discipline (Volkskunde), the belief that folklore was born and changed according to the spirit of the folk was still a bedrock principle of the discipline. Stemming from ‘antiquarian studies’, British folkloristics may have developed independently from the Continent, but this idea of folk creativity – embodied in the work of the enormously influential Jacob Grimm – was nearly universally accepted among both Continental and British folklorists. In a paper read to the Folkl-Lore Society, and subsequently published in Folk-Lore under the title ‘The Folk’, Jacobs argued rather heretically that the individuality of artistry in folklore stems from the ‘folk’ about as much as popular novels arise spontaneously from their subscribers. Jacobs stated, ‘when we come to realise what we mean by saying a custom, tale, a myth arose from the Folk, I fear we must come to the conclusion that the said Folk is a fraud, a delusion, a myth’. And later, more emphatically: ‘the folk is simply a name for our ignorance: we do not know to whom a proverb, a tale, a custom, a myth owes its origin, so we say it originated among the Folk.’

Jacobs’s theoretical approach arose in part as a defence against members of the Folk-Lore Society who accused him of having compromised the integrity of British folklore in his attempts to improve its readability and make it available to a wider audience. In response, Jacobs argued that he could not recognize any ‘hard and fast distinction’ between the creation of oral folklore by the ‘folk’ and written literature. To the extent that the folk did exist, according to Jacobs, any individual (such as himself) who participated in any process of collecting or passing on folklore was a member of said folk. As Jacobs stated, ‘Books are but so many telephones preserving the lore of the Folk, or more often burying it and embalming it. For, after all, we are the Folk as well as the rustic, though their lore may be other than ours, as ours will be different from that of those that follow us.’

There were broader implications to Jacobs’s call for his inclusion in the folk, and against collective folk creativity, than simply defending his own publications. In doing so Jacobs simultaneously negated any exclusionary definitions of ‘the folk’ and challenged any cultural distinctions between himself, a Jew, and European civilization in general. Hence he later claimed that national literature was exactly that, literature, and did not simply emanate from the popular spirit. In this context, Jacobs may have felt justified in participating culturally in British society, as without popular creativity, British folklore could not be considered the exclusive purview of those who traced their origins from there.

The debate over popular creativity came to the fore particularly during the controversy over the origins of the tale of Cinderella which engulfed the Society in 1893 and 1894. Jacobs, as a lone diffusionist, challenged the self-defined ‘anthropological’ folklorists over their claim to the British origins of the Cinderella tale. In contrast to those who believed in popular or folk creativity, adherents of diffusion and borrowing theory argued that each folktale stemmed from an individual artistic act which was then modified, re-interpreted, and transmitted over many generations and often across
thousands of miles. Diffusionists such as Jacobs tended to examine folk-tales for their literary and artistic rather than anthropological merits. While English folkloristics had far fewer nationalist undertones than any equivalent on the Continent, the Cinderella controversy pushed the limits of neutrality in English folklore scholarship. In this rather complicated controversy, the most prominent folklorists in the society, even those who had long embraced diffusion and borrowing theory, clarified or modified their theoretical convictions to support Alfred Nutt's contention that despite some evidence of Indian origin and numerous similar Cinderella plots, the Cinderella tale originated in the British Isles, and evolved to embrace various ancient traditions of the folk. Despite being essentially a Tylorian argument in agreement with the doctrine of survivals, Jacobs's belief that individual folk-tales were created in a single act by individuals and then diffused did not sit well with Nutt and even diffusionist folklorists when the subject at hand was seemingly quintessential British folklore. Nutt accused Jacobs of ignoring the applications of evolutionary theories in the study of folklore, and of inconsistency between his Darwinist views in racial anthropology and lack thereof in cultural anthropology. In response to Jacobs's article 'Cinderella in Britain', Nutt asked in Folk-Lore,

What is the utmost claim of the anthropologist? That a number of tales originate in a social and intellectual stage out of which our own race has emerged, and in which other races have remained.... I cannot understand why Mr. Jacobs who accepts that evidence, who is, in sociology, an evolutionist, should hesitate to accept evolution in folk-literature, should range himself on the side of the revolutionist and 'degradationist', if I may coin an ugly word for an irrational thing. Has man struggled upwards from savagery? If so, then most assuredly his tales have struggled upwards with him.

As used here by Nutt, race seems intended to take on the cultural meaning of the term, as Nutt surely would not include Jacobs's race among the 'other' races which remained in a savage state. Thus, although underlying Jacobs's initial argument against popular creativity may have been his desire to be included, or at least not excluded, from the English folk, it is ironically in the attempted refutation of this argument that an English scholar comes closest to confirming Jacobs's inclusion in the English cultural race. From the perspective of an Englishman such as Nutt, however, Jacobs's argument was not only illogical, but suggested a disconnection between folk-literature or lore, and national history. According to Nutt, folk-literature 'aims at depicting man in the sum total of his activities and emotions'; and he added, 'Literature then cannot disassociate itself from the past of the race: for artist, what has been, is'.

In countering Nutt's claims of inconsistency, Jacobs argued that the very essence of his position was both evolutionary and anthropological (in the spirit of Tylor and Andrew Lang); qualitatively good folklore survives, and bad folklore does not. In his paper 'The Problem of Diffusion: Rejoinder' Jacobs argued with some success that a given folk-tale, if good, is both borrowed and improved upon, and the improved version often becomes the dominant version everywhere, even supplanting the original in its place of origin (Jacobs suggested the hegemony of Grimm's fairy-tales to be the example par-excellence). As folk-tale variants constantly multiply and disappear, Jacobs suggested that folklorists should concentrate on studying the history of the diffusion of specific tales, and refrain from seeing individual tales as reflecting the collective history of any single culture.

Brian Maidment suggests that Jacobs's ardent defence of positions he alone held within the Folk-Lore Society led many of his contemporaries to consider him eccentric. Furthermore, his success in making the non-literary folk heritage of Britain accessible as middle-class literature for children and parents who had lost touch with their oral heritage may not have endeared him to his contemporaries, whose standards and aims, in Maidment's terms, 'were perhaps more pretentious and less attainable'. Yet, in stark contrast to his work on British folklore, Jacobs showed no interest in improving the accessibility of Jewish folklore for the children of West End Jews like himself. Despite his extensive research in British and European folklore, and Jewish physical anthropology, Jacobs denied the existence of an expressly Jewish folklore. In his 1886 lecture to the Jews' College Literary Society entitled 'Jewish Diffusion of Folk-Tales', as well as later articles in the Jewish Encyclopedia (published in New York in 1903), Jacobs argued that although Jews were historically responsible for transmitting folk-tales from east to west, Jews never developed their own folklore due to what he considered the intrinsically irrational nature of folklore, and the fundamentally rational nature of Judaism. In the Jewish Encyclopedia's entry for 'Folk-tale', Jacobs wrote that 'there is little evidence of Jews having had folk-tales of their own', and in the entry for 'Folk-lore' he declared, 'in essence there is no Jewish folk-lore; yet practically... there have been survivals of Jewish folklore in all stages of its development'.

Jacobs conceded that some folkloristic elements exist in both the Bible and the Talmud, but he also claimed that Jewish folkloristic creativity ended with the dispersion, and that persisting Jewish customs which were folkloric in basis were primarily borrowed from non-Jewish cultures. Jacobs explained in 'Jewish Diffusion of Folk-Tales' that the 'bizarre elements of folk and fairy tales' which are survivals of 'savage and idolatrous practices and beliefs involving the grossest and crassest superstitions' were the very same practices that, according to Jacobs, 'were stamped out for ever by the majestic utterances of the prophets, and died away utterly after exile'. Jacobs concluded from this line of reasoning that post-exilic Judaism provided infertile ground for the creation of folkloric literature, as 'Folk-tales could
not, therefore, flourish in an atmosphere denuded of nearly all the superstitious material out of which they are formed.\textsuperscript{41}

Much of Jewish folklore did naturally originate from the peoples among whom the Jews lived. Nonetheless, Jacobs was particularly concerned to emphasize that in his opinion, rational Judaism is intrinsically irrational art. In the process of painting the Jews as more European than Europeans, Jacobs participated in a recasting of Jewish history and culture common to many trying to modernize the religion at the time. The thousands of Jews who moved to England and North America from Eastern Europe brought their superstitions with them. For Jews like Jacobs, desperately trying to combat negative stereotypes of Jews and Judaism, the fact that traditions persisted among East European Jews which were nothing less than folkloric in basis undermined their arguments against the supposed ‘backwardness’ of Jews. Arguing against the existence of Jewish folklore may have been doubly intended to persuade Jews to forsake such backwardness and to convince non-Jews of the misguided nature of their stereotypes of Jewish culture.

Jacobs’s anthropological and folkloristic beliefs, although perhaps not as inconsistent with one another as Nutt argues, do reflect his personal agenda and conflicted Anglo-Jewish identity. On the one hand, Jacobs argued through racial anthropology that the Jews were indeed a race apart from the rest of Europe, and due to environmental factors were in some ways even physically deficient. On the other hand, Jacobs’s desire for cultural inclusion in England is evident in his work for the English Folk-lore Society and also in his attempt to portray Judaism as inherently at odds with irrational folklore. Thus Jacobs’s folkloristic writings reflect his desire to bring about his anthropological hypothesis: if the Jews were to do away with superstition, participate in and embrace English culture – if the Jews, in short, were to become model West End Englishmen as he had – then their physical deficiencies would disappear, and their genius become known to the world. In 1896 Jacobs stated, ‘As we hold to the past as Jews, we can look forward to the future as Englishmen, now that we have been admitted on the closest terms into the great nation with whose future history that of the habitable globe is inextricably bound up.\textsuperscript{42} Yet, despite his belief in the shining future of English Jewry, despite the fact that Jacobs considered Anglo-Jewry the ideal type for global Jewry to model itself, and despite being an accomplished literary and anthropological scholar, he was unable to find steady employment in England. In 1900 he moved to New York.

Moses Gaster: a Jewish folklorist in Edwardian England

Moses Gaster was a Jew and a folklorist in England whose career overlapped with that of Jacobs and continued long after. At first glance, the two men had much in common. They were both Jewish members of the English Folk-Lore Society, and were each involved from the earliest stages in the creation of folklore as a scholarly discipline in England.\textsuperscript{43} Both had rather diverse academic interests, and were vocal advocates on behalf of East European Jewry. Both were also immigrants: Gaster had been forced to leave Romania, while Jacobs came voluntarily from Australia. Lastly, Gaster and Jacobs were fellow members of the elite London Jewish intellectual dining club, the Maccabeans.\textsuperscript{44}

Gaster and Jacobs socialized in the same circle of the London Jewish elite, as well as with the same English folklorists, but in many ways they are a study in contrasts. Moses Gaster was not only a scholar, but also a leader of some stature among Anglo-Jewry. A controversial Haham (akin to Chief Rabbi) of the Sephardic community, a militant Zionist influenced by Peretz Smolenskin and Leon Pinsker, and an early Hebrew revivalist, Gaster was born in 1856 into an elite Jewish family in Bucharest that was sympathetic to Western liberal thought. From his early adulthood he used his family connections to lobby on behalf of his countrymen, and was even involved in the negotiations for the emancipation of Romanian Jewry during the Congress of Berlin in 1878. In the years following the Congress, Gaster became a leading Romanian Jewish intellectual fighting antisemitism, and gradually came to be considered by the Romanian government as an agitator. At the age of 29, in 1885, Gaster was expelled from Romania supposedly for providing details to the West of Romanian antisemitic abuses, and he subsequently immigrated to England in 1886.\textsuperscript{45}

After being expelled from Romania, Gaster increasingly shifted his political focus to Zionism, but he always continued to identify with Romanian culture. As Victor Eskenasy has observed, although Gaster’s adult life in Romania was marked by his progressive transformation into a proto-Zionist militant, remarkably, ‘the political disillusionment which hastened his Judaic militancy did not hamper his recognition as a scholarly authority on the Romanian scene’.\textsuperscript{46} Nor did Gaster ever completely sever his own cultural affinity with Romania. Long after becoming an important British scholar, Gaster continued to publish in the Amuare (Annual pentry israelit - Annual for the Israelites), the maskilic journal of Romanian Jewry, indicating that he continued to feel culturally connected to the Jewish community of his native country.\textsuperscript{47}

Gaster published a large number of folkloric studies in Romanian, German, English, and Hebrew over the course of a long career.\textsuperscript{48} Beginning with his doctoral dissertation at Leipzig University on the historical phonetics of the Romanian language, Gaster eventually became Europe’s pre-eminent authority on Romanian folklore. Almost immediately upon his arrival in England, he was invited to give the Ilchester lectures in Greco-Slavonic literature at Oxford, in which he lectured on the relationship between Greco-Slavonic literature and the folklore of Europe during the middle ages. Gaster understood the significance of this appointment. As he later stated in his
memos (with typically little humility), 'I was the first Jew who had ever been elected to that post [Lichester lecturer at Oxford] and it made a great impression on the Jews, although they understood very little of what it meant. There were not at that time in Oxford more than eight or ten Jewish students.49

Gaster, unlike Jacobs, believed that Jewish folklore was a real and extant phenomenon. In fact, one of the last endeavours of his life was to translate into English the Ma'aseh Book, a Yiddish compilation of Jewish tales and legends which Jacobs had earlier unequivocally suggested did not qualify as evidence of a Jewish folkloristic heritage. Even before this book, Gaster had published many studies of Jewish and Samaritan legends and tales relating to magic, as well as anthologies of rabbinic folk legends. He saw no contradiction between supposedly irrational folk-belief and rational Judaism, and even criticized other folklorists for systematically neglecting the religious elements apparent in all folklore. As Gaster stated in an article published in 1896, 'The element of religious belief, and I take this expression in the widest sense, is one of the most important features in the history of the origin and spread of fairy tales.50 The differences between Jacobs and Gaster on Jewish folklore reflect their disparate origins. Gaster may have been a western-influenced modernizing rabbi, but having grown up in Eastern Europe, he was comfortable with the superstitious elements of both Jewish religion and culture, whereas Jacobs, in contrast, felt compelled to portray Jews as more civilized than even Europeans, in order to push East European Jewry toward West European culture.

Like Jacobs, Gaster valued folklore more for its literary than anthropological merits. But what in particular distinguished Gaster's approach to the study of folklore was his emphasis on the art form's universal human quality. In his presidential address to the English Folk-Lore Society in 1908, Gaster explained that he felt personally involved in the world of fairy tales, charmed by its unbroken spell since his days in nursery. As a romantic he lamented that modern rationalism had lost something beautifully imaginative which existed in the past ('An enchanted world, a weird world, but none the less as real and true as the world in which we are moving now').51 The very beauty of tales, according to Gaster, is that they do not aim to address any narrow religious questions, but rather provide an escape from reality, and exist only as stories in which the conventional rules of the earth do not apply. Thus, their appeal is universal, and not only are all people inclined to create these tales, but once created, folk-tales are universally understood. As Gaster explained, 'The secret of the fairy-tales is that they are thoroughly human, no difference of faith or race, or station of life is recognized. They draw man to man, thereby weaving a spell over our mind.'52

For Gaster, folklore represented the summation of lost innocence in the modern period. Fairy tales and other folklore harkened back to a time when distinctions were not made between humans on the basis of faith or religion.

As a Jew whose interest in folklore began with both Jewish tales and a love for the bird and beast stories of his native Romania, he was well equipped to speak of the universal appeal of folklore. In fact, Gaster proudly attributed his appreciation and wide breadth of folkloric knowledge to his place of upbringing, stating, 'Born and bred in the East, I had greater facilities of coming in contact with the most varied elements of the populace than those given by the artificial and highly secluded form of education in the civilized world of the West.53 In suggesting his eastern upbringing as superior to the 'artificial and highly secluded' western education experienced by members of the Folk-Lore Society, Gaster expressed the extent to which he prized his East European, or at least Romanian, origins.54 Although Gaster was Haham of the small but long established and highly acculturated London Sephardic community (as opposed to the Ashkenazi community), his pride in his East European origins explain why he did not share Jacobs's interest in civilizing eastern Jews.

Gaster's affectionate descriptions of the fantasy world of tales, and the equilibrium established in them between all inhabitants of the earth, human and non-human, are likely a reflection of his own struggles at the time for the Zionist cause as well as for the improvement of living conditions for the Jews in Romania and tsarist Russia. Hence Gaster points out in his 1908 presidential address that the central theme in most tales is an imbalance in the natural order, stating that the 'final act in the little romance is always, justice done to the wronged'.55 Although the metaphor was not necessarily intended, it is worth pointing out that Gaster's presidency of the English Folk-Lore Society also coincided with the most intense period of Zionist activism in his life. In addition to serving as vice-president of several Zionist congresses, helping to establish Jewish colonies in Palestine, and lobbying the British government, he was president of the English Zionist Federation in 1907.56 Whether or not he was intentionally alluding to Zionism, his speeches to the Folk-Lore Society seem to express his Zionist idealism. Lamenting the lack of creativity, unity, and justice in the world, and proclaiming the need to find people with the necessary creativity and will to make changes, Gaster argued in these speeches that the utopian elements found universally in folk-tales reflect human yearning for the creation (or re-creation) of a better and more just world. Folklore, in other words, could doubly serve as inspiration for the achievement of those goals.

As such an ideal state cannot be found in the real world, the poetic imagination of mankind, – the divine gift placed in the cradle of man at his birth, – has created this imaginary world of unity, beauty, and justice, and has transplanted thither all the ideal hopes and aspirations of man. For what have been the ideals which have inspired man from the
beginning and which animate him still in his noblest pursuits? Are they not the desire to realise some of the pictures of the fairy-tales? to create a world that is better, happier, and more glorious; where the differences between man and man have disappeared; where illness and troubles, fleeting shadows like the clouds, are dissipated by a warm and radiant sun; where justice reigns instead of wrong and oppression, and where virtue is rewarded. We may call such a picture a vision or an [sic] Utopia, for we look more to the difficulties which prevent its realisation.57

Although Gaster did not explicitly refer to the situation of the Jews in this speech, having been forced from his native country and currently engaged in a utopian experiment – Zionism – he seems at least implicitly to be relating his own personal experiences. The message Gaster drew from folklore – the need for creativity, high ideals, and belief in the seemingly impossible in addressing the problems of the day – complemented his Zionist idealism, as did his claim that a philosophy that aspires to create a world that is ‘better, happier, and more glorious’ is only considered utopian because ‘we look more for the difficulties that prevent its realisation’.

Gaster was a Zionist and Jewish nationalist, but his underlying cosmopolitan humanism is evident in his folkloric work. He was a Zionist because he had seen first-hand the effects of antisemitism in Eastern Europe, and Zionist ideology appealed to his strong sense of justice and desire to correct the vulnerable position in which the Jews found themselves at the time. As a Zionist, Gaster would have also been aware of the extent to which a cultural foundation is necessary for national identification. There were other Jews during just this period who, also largely because of political disillusionment, came to the same realization: Yiddishists such as I. L. Peretz and Semyon Ansky, and Hebrew revivalists such as H. N. Bialik and M. J. Berdyczewski all collected or reformulated Jewish folklore as part of a national awakening in Eastern Europe.

In his presidential address to the Folk-Lore Society of the following year (1909), Gaster shifted from arguing about the universal virtues of folk-tales to focusing on the need for the study of folklore. Gaster claimed in this address that we must study all elements of folklore as they are the ‘poetical flowers’ containing ‘that ancient knowledge which has permeated the world, and the fragrance of which is keeping the human soul fresh whenever it is wafted upon it’.58 These are words which rabbis, even modern ones, tend to reserve for the Talmud, but Gaster was convinced by the ability of folklore to further human understanding. As he reflected upon the short history of folkloristics, ‘The further students penetrated into the realm of the “Folk,” i.e. that knowledge which is the property of the “Folk,” the greater grew the similarity between one nation and another.’59 Thus, according to Gaster, the significance of folkloristics is as a “bridge between anthropology and psychology, mere man and mere soul, showing unity in spite of difference.”60

Unlike Jacobs, Gaster was not concerned with questions relating to Jewish racial distinction. He accepted national differences, but believed that folklore’s universalism demonstrates the common qualities shared by nations, what he called ‘unity in spite of difference’. Where Jacobs believed the folk to be a ‘fraud’, Gaster believed that we collectively belong to a greater folk, as demonstrated by folklore’s ability to reveal the shared characteristics and unity of all nations. Gaster, unlike Jacobs, would have considered the idea that Jews had no folklore ridiculous, not least because he was a Jewish folklorist, but more importantly, because he believed no nation exists without its own folklore.

Conclusion

The experiences of Jacobs and Gaster suggest a considerable degree of openness in late-Victorian and Edwardian England to Jewish participation in both English cultural production and scholarly discussion. The study of folklore in England, as elsewhere, grew out of a desire to trace national consciousness back historically, but the discipline as it developed – and perhaps also, by implication, English nationalism at the time – was sufficiently inclusive that Jewish individuals such as Gaster and Jacobs could be prominent members of its scholarly society and participate in developing folkloristics as a field of study in England. Each used this forum as a means to minimize national distinctions: in the case of Jacobs, by arguing against the existence of the folk (in which he faced considerable opposition); and in the case of Gaster, by emphasizing the universal qualities of folklore.

Jacobs believed in the exceptional status of modern English Jewry and he attributed its success to a number of historical circumstances stemming from the early decline of feudalism and the rise of commercialism in England, and the religious toleration which was, according to Jacobs, sine qua non for the British imperial project. Most importantly, however, Jacobs believed that the gradual process of emancipation in England ensured its permanence: ‘The Jews had time to prove themselves worthy for admission into the national fold before the gates were unbarred. They took part in all sides of the national life so far as they were permitted.’61 As Jacobs fully accepted the premise that Jews had needed first to prove themselves worthy of emancipation, he personally attempted to continue to prove Jewish worth both by taking part in ‘the national life’, and also in working to demonstrate that the latest wave of Jewish immigrants to England would over time become English in a similar manner.

Gaster, like Jacobs, considered England to be a particularly unrestricted society, both academically and socially. As he later reflected upon his first impressions of the country, ‘There was altogether a different spirit of liberty in England, a different atmosphere in every way, a cordiality and understanding for the demands of human civilisation and human progress.’62
Nonetheless, neither individual was ultimately fully successful in achieving their desired aspirations in England. Although Gaster held a few temporary lecturing positions and fellowships, like Jacobs, he was never granted a permanent post at an English university, despite being considered a pre-eminent thinker in his day.63 In fact, though both men received accolades later in their lives, such recognition was not from English institutions. After moving to the United States in 1900 to become an editor of the Jewish Encyclopedia, Jacobs became a lecturer at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and was even granted an honorary doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania, something he failed to achieve in England. Gaster was awarded numerous honours from his native country (from which he had been expelled); he was made an honorary member of the Romanian Academy, was a Holder of the Romanian Order of Merit, 2nd and 1st classes, and was a Grand Officer of the Order of the Romanian Crown.

While Jacobs held West End Anglo-Jewry to be the model for East End and indeed all of East European Jewry to emulate, Gaster remained very much in touch with his East European roots, and was unthreatened by its culture. And yet, the unexpected irony in this comparison relates to how Gaster, a Zionist Romanian rabbi, was (relatively speaking) more accepted among his English colleagues in the field of English folklore studies than Jacobs, the Cambridge-educated Australian who published several tomes of English and Celtic folklore. Part of the reason for his greater acceptance lay in the fact that Gaster came to England already with a PhD, his studies were more scholarly, and his opinions less at odds (at least in their expression) with the majority of English folklorists. Perhaps because of these factors, as well as his East European upbringing and his Zionist philosophy, Gaster was confident enough to be not only an English folklorist who was Jewish, like Jacobs, but also an English folklorist of the Jews.

Notes
1. G. L. Gomme, 'Folk-Lore Terminology', The Folk-Lore Journal, 2.11 (1884), 348. See also Dorson, 'Folklore Studies', 308. The term 'folklore' was first used in 1846 by the antiquarian William John Thoms.
2. See Dorson, 'The Great Team'.
3. Although it would be reasonable to so speculate, Jacobs never concluded as such, even stating in the introduction to his 1896 collection of essays, Jewish Ideals and Other Essays, 'Here in England we are almost absolutely free from any taint of anti-Semitism.' Joseph Jacobs, Jewish Ideals and Other Essays (London: David Nutt, 1896), xvi. Nevertheless, one essay in this collection ('Mordcaia: a Protest against the Critics', 61–83), an ardent defence of George Eliot's Daniel Deronda, may suggest that Jacobs at times felt otherwise.
4. See Maidment, 'The Literary Career'.
5. British anthropology (unlike its German counterpart) generally took a rather limited and not characteristically negative interest in Jews, reflecting the comparatively benign English perception of the Jews. One notable exception was Robert Knox, who in the mid-nineteenth century imported much of the biological racism of the Continent to England. Efron, Defenders of the Race, 33–57.
6. Anthropometry is the practice of measuring the dimensions of human bodies for the purpose of comparative physical anthropology.
7. For an overview of Jacobs and Jewish race science see Efron, Defenders of the Race, 58–90; Hart, Social Science, 177–179.
8. Jacobs asked, 'What are the qualities, if any, that we are to regard as racially characteristic of Jews?' His answer: 'Much vague declamation has been spoken and written on this subject. All the moral, social, and intellectual qualities of Jews have been spoken as being theirs by right of birth in its physical sense. Jews differ from others in all these points, it is true.' Joseph Jacobs, 'On the Racial Characteristics of Modern Jews', The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 15 (1886), 25.
11. The pioneering anthropologist Franz Boas, a German Jew, was at the time working along similar lines. In 1900 Boas conducted a study among the immigrants to New York demonstrating that skull shape can change due to environment.
14. Jacobs, as Mitchell Hart states (Social Science, 178), 'provides an excellent example of the way in which racial notions could be employed for liberal (i.e., integrationist) purposes'.
15. Tylor claimed that he had developed his argument independently from the theories of Darwin and Spencer. Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, 163.
16. Jacobs later claimed he had written most of the paper's editorials in the important year of 1881. Cesari, The Jewish Chronicle, 68. Jacobs was also editor of the periodical Darkest Russia. For more on the Mansion House Fund and the Mansion House Committee (the Russo-Jewish Committee after 1882) see Black, The Social Politics, 254–267.
17. Efron, Defenders of the Race, 78.
18. Efron, Defenders of the Race, 78.
19. Very few individuals in England could at this time derive their employment primarily from anthropology. As George Stocking states (Victorian Anthropology, 267), 'until nearly 1900, there were probably no more than a dozen men whose professional life was given over solely to anthropological activity, and with the qualified exception of Tylor none of them was regularly involved as an anthropologist in training men who would later devote their own professional lives to anthropology'. Jacobs also wrote extensively as a literary critic, journalist, and historian.

21. Within that period, Jacobs collected, edited, and published folklore collections including: *The Earliest English Version of the Fables of Bidpai*; a collection of *Indian Fairy Tales*; two collections of *Aesop’s Fables*; *English Fairy Tales*; *Celtic Fairy Tales*; *More English Fairy Tales*; *More Celtic Fairy Tales*; *The Most Delectable History of Reynard the Fox*; and *Barlaam and Josaphat: English Lives of Buddha*.

22. Dorson, ‘Folklore Studies’, 310. See also Dorson, *The British Folklorists*.


27. Jacobs, ‘The Folk’, 237, my emphasis. The idea that folklore is not merely a relic of the past, but is continually reshaped and created as a result of communication and performance (identical to Jacobs’s argument) is now an accepted anthropological principle.

28. Borrowing theory, developed by the German scholar Theodor Benfey in the 1850s, purported that European folklore was sourced in ancient India and passed westward over many years.

29. In reference to his opponents, Jacobs stated, ‘These gentlemen, as I have put it previously, are fortune-hunters, who seek to get as much anthropological wealth out of the folk-tale as they can; and I a few others love her for herself alone. And out of this love springs my protest against their use as *copora villa* for the anthropologist, and generally I protest against the practice of regarding folklore as solely so much material for anthropology, so much contribution to the study of institutions and their evolution.... I claim to be an anthropologist also. But my anthropology includes likewise the study of the evolution of man’s artistic nature.’ Joseph Jacobs, ‘The Problem of Diffusion: Rejoinders’, *Folk-Lore*, 5.2 (1894), 145.


31. Alfred Nutt, ‘Some Recent Utterances of Mr. Newell and Mr. Jacobs. A Criticism’, *Folk-Lore*, 4.4 (1893), 442, my emphasis. It is worth noting that in the long run, Jacobs’s theories had greater posterity than those of Nutt and the other evolutionists of the Folk-Lore Society. As Richard Dorson states (‘Folklore Studies’, 306), ‘When anthropology rejected the theory of unilinear cultural evolution in favour of cultural pluralism, the scaffolding of English folklore research collapsed.’


37. Joseph Jacobs, ‘Folk-tales’, *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1903), 5:428. Jacobs justified his negation of the existence of post-exilic Jewish folk-tales based on the very narrow parameters by which he defined the term. Although Jews did compose some tales and borrowed others throughout the European ghettos, according to Jacobs, these are not by definition folk-tales, ‘since nothing fairylike or supernormal occurs in them’ (428).


39. Jacobs stated, ‘Spread among all the peoples of the earth, the Jews appear to have borrowed customs from each of them, and when found among them to-day it is most difficult to determine: first, whether the custom is at all Jewish; and, secondly, if non-Jewish, whether it belongs to the country where the particular folklore item is found or has been brought thither from some other country.’ Jacobs, ‘Folk-lore’, 5:424.


43. Gaster evidently had considerable respect for Jacobs as a folklorist: ‘Jacobs was very clever, very industrious, very keen in his judgement, very quick in his perception of facts and an extremely hard worker; he had to make a livelihood... He was a very good man.’ Bertha Gaster (ed.), *Moses Gaster: Memoirs* (London: 1990), 71–72.

44. The Maccabaean (whose membership also included such notable as Israel Zangwill, Israel Abrahams, Lucien Wolf, Oswald John Simon, Arthur Davis, Herbert Bentwich, Solomon J. Solomon, and Solomon Schechter), officially formed in November 1891 from a group of intellectuals previously known as ‘The Wanderers’. The *Jewish Chronicle* devoted a large amount of space to covering the group’s events and publishing verbatim its members’ speeches and debates. Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 90.

45. What Gaster completed of his memoirs were edited, collated and printed privately by Bertha Gaster under the title, *Moses Gaster: Memoirs* (London: 1990). A more widely circulating publication, Victor Eskenazy (ed.), *Memori (fragmenti) Correspondati/Moses Gaster* (1998) is primarily in Romanian, but includes a short English summary of Gaster’s memoirs and letters as well as a small amount of Gaster’s English correspondence. Also see Bar-Avi, *Dr Moses Gaster*.


47. Stanciu, ‘A Promoter of the Haskalah’.

48. For a complete list of Moses Gaster’s publications see Schindler, *Gaster Centenary Publication*, 23–40.

49. *Moses Gaster: Memoirs*, 71. Gaster wrote the Ilchester lectures in German, and paid Joseph Jacobs to help him translate them into English. Gaster’s failure to thank Jacobs in the introduction to the published edition, according to Gaster, led to resentment on the part of Jacobs. *Moses Gaster: Memoirs*, 76–77.

50. Moses Gaster, ‘Fairy Tales from Inedited Hebrew MSS. of the Ninth and Twelfth Centuries’, *Folk-Lore*, 7.3 (1886), 220.


52. Gaster, ‘Presidential Address’ (1908), 30.


54. Gaster was rather defensive about western Jewish perceptions of Romanian Jewry and argued that the Romanian Jewish experience was historically exceptional within Eastern Europe. As Gaster stated in his memoirs, ‘People in the west thought the Jews of Roumania to be half educated and an eastern lot. They did not know that the Jews there had received an education much superior to, or at least on a level with the Jews in the West, and they were in many ways far superior as far as their character was concerned.’ *Moses Gaster: Memoirs*, 60.

55. Gaster, ‘Presidential Address’ (1908), 23.

56. For a detailed account of Gaster’s Zionist activities see, Black, ‘A Typological Study’.
7
Imperial Zion: Israel Zangwill and the English Origins of Territorialism

David Glover

The great Anglo-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill (1864–1926) has long represented a difficult case in the history of Zionism, so much so that he might scarcely be said to belong to that history at all, a figure more often omitted than remembered. Certainly in the wake of his notorious 1923 Carnegie Hall address to the American Jewish Congress attacking political Zionism – a speech denounced by Chaim Weizmann as tantamount to ‘national treason’ – Zangwill seemed to have sealed his reputation as a dangerous apostate. Yet initially, Zangwill’s Zionist credentials were impeccable. When Theodor Herzl first came to England in November 1895, he made a point of visiting the celebrated author of Children of the Ghetto at his home in Kilburn and, as a direct result of their meeting, Zangwill emerged as one of Zionism’s most prominent advocates in a period when many leading figures in the Jewish community were lukewarm or entirely sceptical about Herzl’s project.

Despite being an early and enthusiastic supporter of Herzl, Zangwill nevertheless shifted position several times in the course of an eventful career. From being thoroughly immersed in the Zionist movement, a familiar face and voice at its annual congresses, Zangwill embarked on a path that was effectively to lead him into the political wilderness, before wearily returning to the fold towards the end of his life when all other hopes appeared to have been exhausted. Whether Zangwill was ever really readmitted, his detour or deviation forgiven, remains an open question. But it is with that detour – or rather with its peculiarly English character and origins – that this essay is concerned.

In a sense, Zangwill’s divergence from Zionism is inseparable from Zionism’s own history and can be traced back to Herzl’s failure to secure Turkish support for a Jewish settlement in Palestine, a failure that was rooted in the inter-imperial rivalries of the late nineteenth century and that encouraged Herzl to turn to other more or less desperate expedients. For over two decades Zangwill immersed himself in the search for a non-Palestinian homeland, a new colonial space that might for the