

**EITAN BAR-YOSEF AND NADIA VALMAN, EDS.**  
**“THE JEW” IN LATE-VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN CULTURE: BETWEEN**  
**THE EAST END AND EAST AFRICA (PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2009) xii +**  
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**reviewed by Todd Endelman**

Acknowledgement of the multi-racial, multi-national, and multi-religious character of Britain’s population at the start of the twenty-first century has led the academy to expand the ways in which it studies the literature of earlier centuries. It is now common to ask how representations of aliens, outsiders, strangers, and other “others,” as well as the work these imagined “others” perform in fiction and poetry, illuminate larger cultural anxieties and political concerns. It is also now common to ask how writers who belong to marginalized groups both echo and subvert these hegemonic representations. The two works under review here, however different their aim and scope, share this outlook.

The collection of essays edited by Eitan Bar-Yosef and Nadia Valman began life as a two-day colloquium at the University of Southampton in July 2003. The references in the subtitle to London’s East End and to British East Africa allude to the central themes of the conference: how Jewish immigration to England from Eastern Europe, British support for the nascent Zionist movement, including an offer of land for Jewish settlement in what is now Kenya (but was then referred to as Uganda), and Jewish participation in the development of the South African diamond industry thrust Jews (real and imagined) into the public arena at the turn of the century. The contributors to the volume, starting from the premise that Jews and Judaism have “always held a unique place in the British cultural imaginary” (7), explore how these historical events invigorated this hoary preoccupation in fiction, journalism, and other media.

The most successful essays in the collection acknowledge and capture the ambivalence in most literary representations of “the Jew.” They point to the limitations of the binary labels “antisemitic” and “philosemitic,” preferring instead to stress the essentialist thinking at work in representing “the Jew” more generally and the capacity of Jews to disturb categories of identity” (national, racial, social) in modern culture by their proverbial liminality. For example, Nadia Valman’s own contribution to the volume, a study of four Anglo-Jewish writers (Samuel Gordon, Benjamin Farjeon, Julia Frankau, and Israel Zangwill) who responded in novels and short stories to the linkage in public debate between immigration and the Boer War, demonstrates the fluidity of essentialist notions of Jewishness. In one late-Victorian text, disciplined, hard-working East End immigrants embody the virtues of free market capitalism; in another, manipulative, parasitical Rand millionaires conspire to undermine British national interests. Valman’s theme is how these four Jewish writers insert, rewrite, and transform these representations, moving between and around them without ever being able to ignore them altogether.

The figure of Israel Zangwill looms large in this collection. He makes an appearance in Valman’s essay, as well as in several others, and takes center

stage in the essays of David Glover and Meri-Jane Rochelson. Zangwill's attitudes to matters Jewish are notoriously difficult to categorize, largely because he was himself so conflicted about Judaism and Jewishness. Glover considers Zangwill's creation of Territorialism (the movement to create a Jewish homeland in a territory other than the Land of Israel) in the context of English imperialism, from which, he argues, Zangwill drew deeply. He argues convincingly that Zangwill's Jewish nationalism, however rooted in his sense of Jewishness, also participated in British fantasies about empire, especially the fantasy of empire "as a *tabula rasa*, a place of fresh starts and new beginnings" (141). Rochelson agrees with Glover about the centrality of the language of British imperialism in Zangwill's Territorialism but offers a broader view of its genesis and development, linking it to his ideas about religious regeneration, international conflict, and the plight of Russian Jewry. The author of a recent, book-length study of Zangwill (*A Jew in the Public Arena*, 2008), Rochelson concludes with an ironic observation about Zangwill, who was frequently pilloried for his 1903 pronouncement "Palestine needs a people; Israel needs a country" (a position he soon abandoned). Compared with the leaders of political Zionism in his lifetime, Rochelson says, Zangwill was acutely aware that the Arabs of Palestine could not be ignored.

Rochelson is sensitive to the dangers of presentism in writing about figures whose commitments remain flashpoints of controversy a century later. But this is not true of every contribution to the volume. Mark Levene's essay on Herzl and the scramble for sub-Saharan Africa argues that British intervention there "profoundly influenced" (203) the writing of *Der Judenstaat* – even though, as he admits, the pamphlet never mentions Africa by name. His evidence is flimsy and his argument is speculative. But his intention, rooted in the current obsession with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in British universities, is clear: to demonize Jewish nationalism by linking one of its ideological forebears with the imperialism of Cecil Rhodes and King Leopold of Belgium. Equally presentist is Eitan Bar-Yosef's essay on the commission sent to East Africa in 1905 by the World Zionist Organization to examine the territory that the British government was offering for Jewish settlement. Bar-Yosef pursues the same strategy as Levine, claiming that Africa played – "and continues to play, even today – a significant role in Zionism's self-fashioning" because it is "a space in which personal and national fantasies can be acted out and made explicit" (184). What Levine and Bar-Yosef forget to mention is that Herzl, who died in 1906, exerted far less influence on the creation of the State of Israel than the leaders of the Labor Zionist parties, whose education, class position, and cultural background were entirely different. To imply that a straight line connects Herzl's fantasies to current realities in Israel and Palestine is tendentious.

The literary and historical ground covered in the volume will be familiar to those who work in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period. A few contributors, however, introduce texts that will not be familiar to even specialists in the period. Adrienne Munich's chapter on three South African diamond field novels addresses the imaginative link between Jews and diamonds, what she calls "the problem of the Jew in the jewel" (20), in ways that expose the cultural unease of

their authors. Jasmine Donahaye's article takes historians of British Jewry (myself included) to task for ignoring the literary output of Welsh Jews, especially the fiction of the now forgotten Lily Tobias, to whom much of this chapter is devoted. Simon Rabinovitch's chapter should also be mentioned in this context, for it examines the contributions of Joseph Jacobs and Moses Gaster to folklore rather than their much better known work in Jewish history and apologetics.

Toby Benis's *Romantic Diasporas* moves back a century to the start of the nineteenth century. It too operates on the premise that texts about outsiders reveal the making of national identity and its tensions, especially when those outsiders were exiles, in this case, French clergy and nobility who fled the revolution, British convicts who were transported to Australia, and Jews, the archetypal exiles and wanderers in Christian theological discourse.

The strongest chapters in the book are the two on narratives about transportation to Australia. One has a sense that here Benis is less dependent on earlier literary scholarship and is charting her own path. Her argument is that "the exile of convicts to Australia brought to the fore public anxieties about the nature of British identity, the nation's political future, and its class structure" (86). In the first of these chapters, she concentrates on narratives about George Barrington, "the prince of pickpockets," whose *modus operandi* was speaking, dressing, and behaving like a well-bred man to gain access to upper-class society; she shows convincingly how unsettling this was and how it continued to shape perceptions of his behavior long after his arrest and transportation. Barrington's relations with other convicts, with officers on the ship carrying him to Australia, and with aboriginal tribesmen fascinated readers because they could be read in so many ways: as a challenge to the fixity of class stratification, as a blurring of the line between the guilty and the innocent, and as evidence of the potentially rehabilitative impact of transportation. But in spite of what Benis argues, the narratives about Barrington and other convicts do not address the formation of British identity. While these narratives have much to say about the rights and wrongs of Britain's class system, they do not speak to the question of defining Britishness or Englishness. Indeed, it is not clear how "anxious" Britons were at the time about matters of national identity.

The second of her chapters on transportation treats narratives about the five Scottish Martyrs who were transported to Botany Bay in the mid-1790s for seditious libel. Here too Benis demonstrates the fruitfulness of reading narratives on the trial, transportation, and exile of these five--by Godwin, Coleridge, and others--as contributions to contemporary political debate. She also shows how "the threat of exile shaped in crucial ways the rhetoric and tactic of British reformers" at the time, who subverted the very aim of transportation -- the physical and imaginative banishment of the government's political enemies -- by ensuring that this exile did not simply "slip off the map" (128). Again, however, Benis claims too much when she argues that these narratives "call into question key assumptions about the nature of nationality" (128). When she writes of their interrogation of the nature of crime and Britain's class system, she is on firmer ground.

Benis's book ends with a chapter on Maria Edgeworth's *Harrington*, which she terms "the touchstone work for Romantic scholarship on Jews and Judaism" (133). In this chapter, she explicitly links the different exile communities whose representations are her subject, claiming that "how Britons responded to Jews anticipated and set the terms for the questions raised by French émigrés and transported British convicts" (132). This is a large claim and one that Benis's exposition does not support. Even less convincing is her claim that the obstacles to integration and acceptance that confronted English Jews "looked ahead" to those experienced by "English/French hybrids" and to convicts of real or imagined "foreign" origin (133). While her reading of *Harrington* is illuminating, especially when she writes about the central trope of ventriloquism in the novel, it does not strengthen either of the claims that provide the unifying theme of the book.

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