

**Yiddish Poetry and Popular Song of London,  
1884-1914:  
anglicisation, transnationalism  
and cultural controversy.**

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Vivienne Lachs hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

## **Abstract**

Yiddish-speaking immigrants arriving in London from the early 1880s, developed a rich cultural life. They established a Yiddish press, publishing houses, theatres and music halls. Although these institutions were often small and short-lived, the vibrancy of the popular culture is evident in the hundreds of songs and poems published in newspapers, periodicals, songbooks and penny songsheets. Many of these texts were home-grown, offering tantalising glimpses into London immigrant experience.

This thesis analyses the socialist poetry, music-hall song and satirical verse written by immigrants to London about London immigrant life. The texts refer to local ideas, events and politics, alluding to community personalities, known places and English mores. They engage with conflict between Anglo-Jews, immigrant orthodox and socialists, holding positions in topical debates and arguing particular points. They tell unknown tales of changing sexual mores and nuance the place of religious ideas in the process of modernity. As Anglo-Yiddish texts, they can be seen as part of a process of anglicisation. Anglicisation is a contested term, and took different forms depending on the ideology of the writers: socialist revolutionaries, libertine entertainers or traditionally religious satirists.

The writers and performers used a wide source of inspiration, and their poetry and song reflects the transnational world they inhabited. Lyrics allude to Eastern European and Yiddish Diaspora cultures, combining elements of the old homeland with new English mores. Some socialist poems became international anthems of the Jewish workers, and popular Anglo-Yiddish songs from the London halls travelled abroad with their singers. Performance was crucial in communicating the layers of meaning, that could only be deciphered by an audience imbued with the transnational cultural mix of immigrant London. I suggest that these layered texts that tier idea upon idea, experience upon experience, local upon transnational constitute a vibrant and revealing aspect of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture.

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## Note on the Transliteration of the Yiddish

Yiddish is written using the Hebrew alphabet. This is transliterated in this thesis according to the standard YIVO transliteration. However, there are a number of caveats. The Yiddish of the poetry and song source material has a variety of non-standard spellings, including Germanic-style, Polish dialect, ‘theatre’ pronunciation and anglicised words. I have tried to be faithful to the rhyme and the feel of the Yiddish in the texts:

1. I have not invalidated any rhymes. For example *gring* and *ying* or *gayt* and *fayt*.
2. I have not changed non-standard Yiddish titles of journals or texts. For example *Idisher ekspres* and ‘A khoydesh on arbayt’.
3. If there are known transcriptions for Yiddish words, I have used these forms, such as *shechita* or *Torah*. However, if these words come up in Yiddish texts, I have used the YIVO transliteration.
4. For names of London personalities and titles of London Yiddish newspapers I have used the transliteration from the main entry in Leonard Prager’s *Yiddish Culture in Britain*. Exceptions are made for accepted anglicised spellings such as Morris Winchevsky, Joseph Markovitsh or Kalman Marmor.

Yiddish does not use capital letters. I have capitalised the beginning of sentences, peoples’ names and the first names of journals, articles, poem and song titles. Any other capitalisation is from words emphasised in the Yiddish text.

When referring to newspapers I have generally removed the Yiddish definite article replacing it with English.

All translations from Yiddish to English are my own unless stated.

For examples of Yiddish text, see Appendix 4.



## List of Abbreviations

AF	Arbayter fraynd
ELO	East London Observer
FV	Fraye velt
IE	Idisher ekspres
IS	Idishe shtime
JC	Jewish Chronicle
JW	Jewish World
LK	Londoner kupletist
LLM	Londoner lider magazin
LUG	Lider un gedikhter
MF	Morgen freiheit
MPC	Mazower Private Collection
NLI	National Library of Israel
PP	Poylishe yidl
SG	Songsheet Goldberg
SM	— — — — Mazin
SR	— — — — Ruderman
SY	— — — — Yozef
YK	Yidisher kultur

## Introduction

Between 1881 and 1914, around 100,000 Jews from Eastern Europe settled in London.<sup>1</sup> These Yiddish-speaking immigrants entered an overcrowded labour and housing market where they struggled to get a foothold, find work and earn a living. At the same time they entered an expanding immigrant community immersed in debate and conflict between Anglo-Jews, immigrant orthodox, socialists and anarchists. The Yiddish language was ubiquitous in London's East End. Cultural institutions developed from the mid-1880s with a small but active socialist Yiddish press, a growing mainstream press, Yiddish publishing houses, a struggling Yiddish theatre and a handful of Yiddish music halls. This cultural life partly re-created aspects of the Eastern European community the immigrants had left, but more significantly it responded to the new life in England, with new ways of practical living and social mores. Immigrant writers and actors published poetry and performed songs pertaining to their lives as immigrants to London. The breadth of their past experiences, their divergent ideologies, the combination of their movement from one country to another and the desire to acculturate to England appear as motifs in hundreds of Yiddish songs and poems that make up part of an Anglo-Yiddish popular culture.

## The Primary Source Texts

There are around 380 songs and poems, all in rhyming couplets, written by Yiddish-speaking immigrants to London about the immigrant experience, and published in the Yiddish press, journals and song collections. They can be classified into three distinct genres: socialist poetry, music-hall songs and satirical verse. The socialist poetry was published in the Anglo-Yiddish socialist press mostly between 1884 and 1894: the *Poylishe yidl* (Polish Jew), the *Tsukunft* (Future), the *Arbayter fraynd* (Workers' Friend), the *Fraye velt* (Free World) and the *Veker* (Awakener). The large majority of these

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<sup>1</sup> Todd Endelman argues that by the start of the First World War there were 180,000 Jews living in London. This includes around 60,000 of the Anglo Jewish community. The population of Jews in Britain was around 300,000 with substantial communities in Manchester and Leeds, and smaller ones in Liverpool, Glasgow and Birmingham. Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain 1656-2000* (California: University of California Press, 2002), 127, 130. See also Vivian Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), 12. The number of Yiddish-speaking immigrants in London at any one time was significantly greater than those settling, due to migrants on route to New York.

poems, ballads, and anthems were written by the popular writer and poet Morris Winchevsky, who was known as the *zeyde* (grandfather) of Yiddish socialism.<sup>2</sup>

The Anglo-Yiddish popular songs were written around the turn of the twentieth century and performed in London Yiddish music halls. They were published as penny songsheets and cheap songbooks, such as the *Londoner kupletist* and the *Londoner lid magazin*.<sup>3</sup> Anglo-Yiddish music-hall singer songwriters, such as Arn Nager and Joseph Markovitch, travelled across the Yiddish world with their repertoire, adapting it, where necessary, to new locations.

Satirical verse was mostly published in the five years prior to the First World War, with the majority between 1911 and 1913. This material comes from the *Idisher ekspres* (Jewish Express), the *Tsayt* (Times) and the *Blofer* (The Bluffer).<sup>4</sup> The most prolific satirist, writing for all these papers and editor of the *Blofer*, was Dr Avrom Margolin who wrote under the pseudonym Avreml.<sup>5</sup> His poems are written from a more mainstream religious but non-orthodox perspective.

Of this newly found collection of Anglo-Yiddish popular poetry and songs, just over a quarter of the 380 texts, nearly a hundred poems and songs, are analysed in this thesis: 43 socialist poems (of which 38 are by Winchevsky), 35 music-hall songs (and a further 5 only mentioned in footnotes), and 19 satirical poems. These texts were chosen for relevance to the themes that make up the research chapters of this thesis: transnationalism, politics, sex and religion.

### **Contribution to knowledge**

In this thesis, the background to Anglo-Yiddish popular culture and all four research chapters contain re-discovered archive material and offer new perspectives on Anglo-Jewish historiography. There are, however, three areas that make a significantly novel contribution. The first area, the subject of chapter two, is the history of Yiddish popular culture in London, to include the popular press and theatre, socialist verse, satire and

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<sup>2</sup> Winchevsky was the first of the ‘sweatshop’ or ‘proletarian’ poets: Morris Winchevsky (1856-1932) Morris Rosenfeld (1862-1923), Dovid Edelshtadt (1866-1892) and Joseph Bovshover (1873-1915).

<sup>3</sup> The *LK* had at least eight issues, some collected into a volume of 150 songs. The *LLM* had at least two issues. Only incomplete copies survive with unclear pagination. I cite from the one-volume *LK*.

<sup>4</sup> The *Blofer* published 39 issues between 1911 and 1913.

<sup>5</sup> Avrom Margolin (1884-1961).

music-hall songs. The second and third areas, the subjects of chapters five and six, concern the themes of sex and relationships, and the process of how religion was changing. Insights on these themes come from the layers of cultural references in the poetry and song lyrics.

The history of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture contained in this thesis is mainly gleaned from Yiddish primary sources: theatre reviews, newspaper articles and memoirs. These sources begin to draw a picture of a Yiddish-speaking East End where writers, actors and audiences are in close communication, producing and consuming Yiddish language culture. This popular culture can be seen within the political socialist sphere, in the pages of the Yiddish press and in music-hall and theatrical entertainment.

The history of intimate sexual relations is almost entirely absent from scholarly research. When it appears, it is within the context of crime and prostitution.<sup>6</sup> Yet the themes of marriage, relationships, sex and sexual exploitation appear regularly in music-hall songs. They allude to the changing nature of sexual roles and relationships in the immigrant London community, and offer perspectives, albeit laden with music-hall humour and *double entendres*, on how sexual relations are changed both by engagement with modernity and by the process of immigration.

The institutional side of religion is well researched by scholars, including conflicts between religious and socialists.<sup>7</sup> However, popular texts nuance what we know through the glimpses they give us into how the practice of religion and growing secularisation was changing immigrants' daily lives in the encounter with modernity. The texts highlight how some immigrants were trying to change religious practice without losing

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<sup>6</sup> There is significant scholarship on Jewish prostitution and Jewish involvement in the White Slave Trade. Edward Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: Jewish Fight Against White Slavery, 1870-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982); Lara Marks, 'Race, Class and Gender: The Experiences of Jewish Prostitutes and Other Jewish Women in the East End of London at the Turn of the Century', in *Women, Migration and Empire*, ed. Joan Grant (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham, 1996); Paul Knepper, 'British Jews and the Racialisation of Crime in the Age of Empire', *British Journal of Criminology* 47, no. 1 (January 2007): 61–79; Lloyd Gartner, 'Anglo-Jewry and the Jewish International Traffic in Prostitution, 1885-1914', *AJS Review* 7 (1982): 129–78; Susan L Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880–1939* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014), 131–48.

<sup>7</sup> See in particular Geoffrey Alderman, *The Federation of Synagogues, 1887-1987* (London: The Federation of Synagogues, 1987); Bernard Homa, *A Fortress in Anglo-Jewry: The Story of the Machzike Hadath* (London: Shapiro, Vallentine, 1953); Salmond Levin, 'The Changing Pattern of Jewish Education', in *A Century of Anglo-Jewish Life*, ed. Salmond Levin (London: United Synagogue, 1971); Aubrey Newman, *The United Synagogue, 1870-1970* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1976). For the conflict with religious and socialist, see later literature review.

the quality of their religious lives, and others were abandoning religion for new philosophies or ideologies. In addition, all three popular genres use religious language and imagery, whether engaging with religious, secular or atheist ideas, displaying how religion structured the way the community thought and communicated.

It is important, however, to add a caveat. Much can be taken from these sources about the structure of the popular culture, what was being consumed, and details of daily lived lives. However, the reception history, that is the effect of the popular culture on the immigrant community, is less reliable. The paucity of primary evidence limits what can be claimed with certainty. In addition, theatre reviews and articles are often written, unabashedly, from particular standpoints. Claims about reception made in this thesis are, therefore, tentative and limited.

### **Anglo-Yiddish**

The three genres: socialist poetry, music-hall songs and satirical verse, are part of what I am calling Anglo-Yiddish popular culture. In this thesis the term ‘Anglo-Yiddish’ refers to the use of Yiddish as a language to write about the experience of immigration to England. Sometimes the Yiddish is indeed scattered with English words in an ‘anglicised’ form of Yiddish.<sup>8</sup> The Anglo-Yiddish texts, therefore, refer to songs and poems written in Yiddish about the immigrant experience to England by Yiddish-speaking writers, journalists, poets and satirists who were themselves immigrants to England. The texts were written for London immigrant audiences and performed in Yiddish theatres and music halls in London and published in the Anglo-Yiddish press. Thus the term ‘Anglo-Yiddish’ does not apply to the immigrant *community*, because the community did not only include Yiddish speakers, as English became the spoken language of the often bilingual second generation. In this thesis the term ‘Anglo-Yiddish’ applies solely to the popular culture of Yiddish poems and songs.

The texts making up my research are not the sum total of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture. Besides the poetic form there was a lot of other creative work being published in Yiddish about London. The papers, journals and pamphlets were full of satirical prose,

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<sup>8</sup> I have sometimes heard anglicised Yiddish referred to as ‘Cockney-Yiddish’ by elderly ex-East Enders. Although I have not seen this term used in any academic texts, reference has been made to how Yiddish words became part of Cockney slang. See William Matthews, *Cockney, Past and Present: A Short History of the Dialect of London* (London: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1938), 142.

fiction, political cartoons, plays, features, reviews and opinions. As well as focusing on England as the subject of poetry and song, other popular culture included translations from English and European literature into Yiddish, generally serialised in newspapers. Towards the end of the period discussed, Yiddish cinema was becoming more popular than the theatre. In addition, outside of writing and performing in Yiddish, popular culture amongst the immigrants included boxing, gambling on dogs and horses and social life in cafes and workingmen's clubs. The Anglo-Yiddish popular texts I am concentrating on are all written in Yiddish, published in London and about the experience of being immigrants to England.

This thesis argues that Yiddish poetry and song of the period constituted an important part of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture. Taking aspects of lived experience as their inspiration, these accessible, political, thought provoking, comic and moving texts do not mirror, but evoke and comment on reality. They are creative and contain imaginative ideas and fictional experiences, and are written by writers with clear agendas and goals. The writers and their texts are situated within an immigrant world, a Yiddish world and an English world, and engage with all three. As commentary on the worlds that they inhabit, the texts offer insights and nuances into Anglo-Jewish historiography.

### **Popular Culture in the Literature**

The cultural milieu of the Yiddish-speaking immigrants to Britain has been largely ignored in Anglo-Jewish historiography of this period. Early historians focused solely on the Anglo-Jewish establishment, society and institutions.<sup>9</sup> When the immigrant society was addressed, scholars generally used Anglo-Jewish sources, and analysed Anglo-Jewish response to, and support for, the immigrants.<sup>10</sup> In 1960 American historian Lloyd Gartner brought greater exposure and importance to the history of the

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<sup>9</sup> Cecil Roth was the only professional historian writing Anglo-Jewish history from the 1920s to 1960s, and was largely apologetic in tone. His history of English Jews ends after emancipation in 1858. Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949). Key histories of Anglo-Jewry include Israel Finestein, *Jewish Society in Victorian England: Collected Essays* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1993); Israel Finestein, *Anglo-Jewry in Changing Times: Studies in Diversity, 1840-1914* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Vivian Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England: 1850-1950* (London: Watts, 1954); Vivian Lipman, *A Century of Social Service, 1859-1959: The Jewish Board of Guardians* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959); *ibid.*; Newman, *The United Synagogue, 1870-1970*; Alderman, *Federation of Synagogues*; Eugene Black C., *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry: 1880-1920* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988). Black does show the participation of the immigrants in their own acculturation through the establishment of self-help groups.

Yiddish-speaking immigrants in England. As well as analysing Anglo-Jewish responses to immigration, Gartner explores the diversity within the Jewish community and the internal workings of the immigrant society. He is one of the first historians to use Yiddish sources mainly from the London Yiddish press, and, indeed, demonstrates the importance of Yiddish cultural texts in examining the period.<sup>11</sup>

Historians' focus on the immigrant community increased from the 1980s. The beginnings of Jewish socialism and unionism are traced by William Fishman, who shows the conflict between Anglo-Jewry and radical activism from the perspective of the radicals. He concentrates on the in-fighting between factions on the left, highlighting the role of Jewish radicals in union activity, and arguing for the centrality of the *Arbayter fraynd* (Workers' Friend) newspaper to the socialist and anarchist struggle in London. Fishman makes extensive use of the memoirs of anarchist leader Rudolf Rocker and source material from the *Arbayter fraynd*. In a more domestic sphere, Jerry White provides accounts of daily life from interviews with inhabitants of the Rothschild Buildings model dwellings. These provide detailed background to the audiences of the Yiddish theatre and music hall.<sup>12</sup>

From around the 1990s historians began to make more critical explorations of the immigrant experience. These historians wrote about neglected areas of research, explored intra-communal conflict in the community and anti-Semitism, and brought a more analytic and in depth perspective. The tensions between Anglo-Jews and immigrants, and the dilemmas concerning loyalties to both country and fellow Jews are analysed by David Cesarani. The lack of community cohesion is emphasised in Todd Endelman's work. Michael Clark examined the tension between faith and identity and includes a final chapter stressing how Anglo-Jewish charities became agents of social control. One of the most recent additions to Anglo-Jewish historiography is Susan Tananbaum's research on the Anglo-Jewish establishment support for the anglicisation of the immigrants. She writes this history from the perspective of women and children, and includes areas of education and public health.<sup>13</sup> Although none of these works

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<sup>11</sup> Lloyd Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914* (London: Simon Publications, 1973).

<sup>12</sup> William Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914* (London: Duckworth, 1975); Rudolph Rocker and Colin Ward, *The London Years* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Press, 2005); Jerry White, *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block 1887-1920* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> David Cesarani, 'Dual Heritage or Duel of Heritages? Englishness and Jewishness in the Heritage Industry', in *British History. Englishness and Jewishness*, ed. Tony Kushner (London: Frank Cass, 1992); Endelman, *Jews of Britain*; Michael Clark, *Albion and Jerusalem: The Anglo-Jewish Community*

concern Yiddish popular culture, the issues of conflict they describe appear in the Anglo-Yiddish poetry and song making up this thesis.

Of particular impact in relation to the socialist poetry in this study is research that recognises the importance of class in Anglo-Jewish history, and how the combination of class and ethnicity have played out in working-class culture in London's East End and provincial towns. David Feldman's *Englishmen and Jews* analyses how political changes in the UK led to huge changes in terms of anglicisation in the greatly increasing Jewish population pre-1914. He explores the structures of protest against working conditions, and focuses on both the conflict between the Anglo-Jews and the immigrants and the relationship between immigrants and the English working class. This thesis draws significantly on this work in addressing the background context of work and anglicisation. Anne Kershen analyses unionisation and union activity among the immigrants and Bill Williams argues for the existence of the 'alrightnik' class of upwardly mobile Jews.<sup>14</sup> These studies offer background information to the tensions and conflicts that are the source of much of Winchevsky's poetry.

Jewish crime in the immigrant community was sometimes connected to Yiddish culture; gangs would meet and sometimes fight in the halls where Yiddish song was performed.<sup>15</sup> This created community anxiety about the nature of the music halls as places of disrepute. Issues around violence and prostitution appear in the lyrics of the Yiddish songs and verse but are often coded. The secondary literature offers ways into the assumed knowledge the texts contain. The transnational nature of Jewish involvement in the white slave trade is explored in depth by Edward Bristow, and London-based crime is explored in the research of Lara Marks and Paul Knepper. Donald Rumbelow gives a detailed narrative on the Houndsditch murders and the siege

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*in the Post-Emancipation Era, 1858-1887* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Tananbaum, *Immigrants in London*.

<sup>14</sup> David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1994); Anne Kershen J., *Uniting the Tailors: Trade Unionism Amongst the Tailoring Workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939* (London: F. Cass, 1995); Bill Williams, 'East and West' in Manchester Jewry, 1880-1914', in *The Making of Modern Anglo Jewry*, ed. David Cesarani (London: B. Blackwell, 1990). For the provinces, also see Bill Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry 1740-1875* (Manchester University Press, 1985); Joseph Buckman, *Immigrants and the Class Struggle: The Jewish Immigrants in Leeds, 1880-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983); Ben Braber, *Jews in Glasgow 1879-1939: Immigration and Integration* (London: Vallentine Mitchell in association with EJPS, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> James Morton, *East End Gangland & Gangland International Omnibus* (London: Timewarner Paperbacks, 2003), 47-9.



of Sidney Street using police reports, and Colin Holmes assesses Jewish involvement in East End murders, the ensuing English reaction and fears around anti-Semitism.<sup>16</sup>

These Anglo-Jewish histories offer insights into the tensions and conflicts that occurred in the East End, of which the Yiddish popular texts are an integral part. However, although some of this scholarship gives a passing reference to Yiddish cultural texts, there is little dedicated work in this field. Although there are a number of scholars researching Anglo-Jewish fiction and poetry written in English, their work does not include immigrant literature in Yiddish.<sup>17</sup> Partly this is due to the swift decline of Yiddish as a mother-tongue in Britain, and few scholars of Anglo-Jewish history, literature or theatre have been able to access relevant materials. Although there has been a Yiddish revival in America, which has contributed to significant scholarship there, in England the revival is small.

The foremost scholar of British Yiddish culture is Leonard Prager. His 750-page single-volume lexicon *Yiddish Culture in Britain* is an invaluable resource for researchers. It is broad in its remit, yet includes meticulous detail on people, places, events and publications, directing researchers to libraries and archives across the world. Prager also produced a bibliography of the Anglo-Yiddish press, an inventory of all Yiddish songs published in London as songsheets and translations of unknown works of Anglo-Yiddish fiction.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> As well as the works mentioned earlier: Bristow, *Prostitution, Prejudice*; Marks, 'Race, Class and Gender'; Knepper, 'Racialisation of Crime', see also Donald Rumbelow, *The Houndsditch Murders and the Siege of Sidney Street* (Stroud: History Press Limited, 2009); Colin Holmes, 'East End Crime and the Jewish Community, 1887-1911', in *The Jewish East End 1840-1939* (London: The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1981); Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979).

<sup>17</sup> See Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of 'the Jew' in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Meri-Jane Rochelson, *A Jew in the Public Arena: The Career of Israel Zangwill* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010); Peter Lawson and Anthony Rudolf, *Anglo-Jewish Poetry from Isaac Rosenberg to Elaine Feinstein* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006). At a recent conference there was a panel on the works of Amy Levy, with a new interest in her works. In particular Martin Kinderman, 'My Love She Dwells in London Town: Conceptions of Urban Love in Amy Levy's Poetry' (Conference, Literary London Society, London, 22 July 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Leonard Prager, *Yiddish Culture in Britain: A Guide* (Frankfurt Am Maine: Peter Lang, 1990); Leonard Prager, 'A Bibliography of Yiddish Periodicals in Great Britain 1867-1967', *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore*, no. Spring (1969): 3-32; Leonard Prager, 'Paul Muni's Parents Sing at a London Yiddish Music Hall', in *Language and Civilization; a Concerted Profusion of Essays and Studies in Honour of Otto Hietsch*, vol. 2 vols (Frankfurt: Peter Laing, 1992); Leonard Prager, 'The Beginnings of Yiddish Fiction in England', in *Studies in the Cultural Life of the Jews in England*, ed. Dov Noy and Issachar Ben-Ami (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975).

The main medium for the poetry examined in this thesis was the London Yiddish Press. In addition to Prager's bibliography, the work of Jacob Hodes surveys the development and variety of the Yiddish press in London and the fierce competition for readership. It discusses the unsuccessful attempts by the *Jewish Chronicle* and the *Jewish World* to include Yiddish supplements as a way of drawing in immigrant readers. Avrom Vevyorke analyses the contact between the English and Yiddish presses, and how hard it was to stop direct copying and pilfering of stories across the Yiddish world. Both Rucker and Fishman examined the histories of the *Poylishe yidl* and the *Arbayter fraynd*.<sup>19</sup>

The first genre of texts analysed in this thesis is the socialist poetry of Morris Winchevsky. There is substantial material written about Winchevsky in Yiddish published in the American-Yiddish press both during his lifetime and after his death in 1932. Winchevsky was a well-loved celebrity, and many articles were written by devoted supporters lauding the political activism of his socialist writing. They often quoted and described his poetry but rarely with critical analysis.<sup>20</sup> There are also memoirs of radical activists who include stories of contact with Winchevsky.<sup>21</sup> Scholarly research on Winchevsky is thinner on the ground. Some writers have analysed his poetry, debating whether it has literary merit as lyrical poetry or whether it is socialist activist verse with little aesthetic value. This can be traced in Winchevsky's biography by Kalman Marmor.<sup>22</sup> However, there has been no major scholarly work on Winchevsky in English. Melekh Epstein gives a short biography of Winchevsky as the

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<sup>19</sup> Jacob Hodes, 'Tsu der geshikhte fun der english-yidisher prese', in *Yidn in england: shtudies un materialn 1880-1940*, ed. YIVO (New York: YIVO, 1966); Avrom Vevyorke, *Di idishe prese un dos idishe teater in london* (London: M Susman n.d.); Rucker and Ward, *London Years*; William Fishman, *Morris Winchevsky's London Yiddish Newspaper: One Hundred Years in Retrospect* (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1985). Both Hodes and Vevyorke edited London Yiddish newspapers.

<sup>20</sup> Posters for meetings billed Winchevsky as *belibte zeyde* (beloved grandfather) YIVO archive, New York. Newspapers articles described him as if he was a Yiddish theatre star. See the series of articles by bibliographer Yoel Entin in *Morgen dzurnal* including 'Veg keyn amerike hot gefirt durkh london', *Ibid.*, November 1943, 14. poet and literary critic Ber Grin's articles in *MF* between 1954 and 1962 including 'Er hot gebrakht likht', *MF*, 21 March 1954, and playwright Leon Kobrin, 'Der zeyde moris vintshevski, mayn ershte bagegenish mit im', *MF* 3 June (1956). Also articles by Shakhne Epshteyn, A. R. Malakhi, Shmuel Niger, Peysakh Novik and Sh. Zinger.

<sup>21</sup> Particularly those of Shaul Yanovski, *Ershte yorn fun yidishn frayhaytlekhn sotsialism* (New York: Fraye arbeter shtime, 1948), 136-85; Mordkhe Spektor, *Moment fotografyfes* (Warsaw: A. Gitin, n.d), 69-85.

<sup>22</sup> Scholarly work includes that of Abraham Bik, *Moris vintshevski, troymer un kemfer* (Los Angeles: Arbeter Ring, 1956); Kalman Marmor, *Moris vintshevski, zayn lebn, virkn un shafn* (New York: Freiheit, 1928); Also A. Litvak [Khayim Yankl Helfand], 'Moris vintshevski, der onheyber, der veker', *Der veker* 2 April (1932), 4-11; Nokhum Borukh Minkov. *Pionirn fun yiddisher poezye in amerike: (Dos sotsiale lid*. New York: 1956), 7-85; Nakhman Mayzel. 'Y. l. perets un moris vintshevski', *YK*, November (1950), 3-10.

first of eleven key personalities of the immigrant era. Fishman includes Winchevsky's role as the instigator of Jewish socialism. Although Winchevsky's poetry may be mentioned and occasionally quoted, historians' focus is on his political activism and influence rather than his poetry.<sup>23</sup> As an important writer and activist, Winchevsky is included briefly in broad works of Jewish radical history and Anglo-Jewish history.<sup>24</sup>

The second genre of the texts in this thesis are Yiddish popular songs sung in the Yiddish music halls. Most research on the Anglo-Yiddish theatre describes companies, theatres, repertoire and personalities but offers little analysis of performance texts. The most detailed research is that of Yiddish actor Shmuel Yankel Harendorf, who explores the controversies between Anglo-Jews and the Yiddish theatre. Myer Landa emphasises the amateur nature of the London Yiddish stage, and, although he includes a chapter on the character of the Jew in the English music hall, there is no mention of the Yiddish halls.<sup>25</sup> In 1987 the Museum of the Jewish East End produced an exhibition on the Yiddish theatre, including an excellent catalogue of photographs and narrative by David Mazower. Although concise, the article offers both detail and interpretation. The most recent work on Jewish theatre culture in Britain is Ed Marshall's unpublished PhD thesis examining the role of Anglo Jews from immigrant backgrounds in the British entertainment industry. In broader works on the Yiddish theatre, the Yiddish stage in London is seen as marginal and only relevant enough for a few pages in American historian Nahma Sandrow's book *Vagabond Stars*.<sup>26</sup>

The Anglo-Yiddish music hall caused controversy and conflict despite its popularity. This popularity can be seen in the amount of published songs. In an article about the

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<sup>23</sup> Melekh Epstein, *Profiles of Eleven: Profiles of Eleven Men Who Guided the Destiny of an Immigrant Society and Stimulated Social Consciousness among the American People* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), 13–48; Rucker and Ward, *London Years*, 57–61; Fishman, *Radicals*, 138–51, 193–4.

<sup>24</sup> See for example, Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 106–9; Nora Levin, *Jewish Socialist Movements: 1871-1917* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 126–32; Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 29–50, 124–31; Sol Liptzin, *A History of Yiddish Literature* (New York: Jonathan David, 1985), 70–2.

<sup>25</sup> Myer Landa, *The Jew in Drama* (New York: KTAV Pub. House, 1969). See also Leib Shalom Kreditor, 'Yidish teatr in london: shtrikhn un episodn', in *Hundert yor yidish teatr*, ed. Y Klinger (London: Lett Printers, 1962); Moris Mayer, *Idish teatr in london 1902-1942* (London: Naroditzki Press, n.d.).

<sup>26</sup> Shmuel Jacob Harendorf, 'Yidish teatr in england', in *Yidn in england*. Harendorf also wrote *Theatre Caravans: Humorous Sketches* (London: Harendorf, 1954); David Mazower, *Yiddish Theatre in London* (London: Museum of the Jewish East End, 1987); Edward Marshall, 'Ambivalent Images: A Survey of Jewish Involvement and Representation in the British Entertainment Industry, 1880-1980.' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2010); Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

American actor Paul Muni and the London Yiddish music hall, Prager lists 244 Yiddish songsheets published by three London publishers Mazin and Co, M. Yozef and Ruderman.<sup>27</sup> He describes a handful of these songsheets by Yozef analysing how they were doctored by the publishers for ideological and advertising purposes. The Israeli historian and collector Khone Shmeruk briefly analyses three London songsheets, which he reprinted. The closest examination of Anglo-Yiddish cultural texts is Mazower's analysis of the *Melo-deklamatsies* (performance couplets) of the playwright Joseph Markovitch that he performed in the London Yiddish music hall.<sup>28</sup> New research in this area is long overdue.

A number of memoirs cover this period and give insight into direct experience. Of specific interest to this thesis are those of: Zelig Oberman, covering his immigrant experience as a *hasidic* Jew; Rudolf Rocker's autobiography *The London Years* which deals with his editorship of the *Arbayter fraynd*, and Thomas Eyges' memoir of his conversion to anarchism. The famous actor Jacob Adler's memoir was translated by his granddaughter Lulla Rosenfeld, who also wrote her own biography of him. A memoir by Joseph Markovitch was published in *Di idische shtime* and Yiddish actor Boez Yong wrote about his contact with the London Yiddish stage.<sup>29</sup> There are also a few works of fiction written by immigrants about London East End life that give an alternative perspective of the time: Isaac Stone wrote stories about the hardship of busy and slack times in seasonal work; Nosn Berlin's satire on life amongst Anglo-Jewry condemned the hypocrisy of the Anglo-Jews; Joseph Chaim Brenner's two novels in Hebrew tell of the tensions and challenges of life in an East End publishing house and Jewish homelessness on the streets of the East End and the paucity of charity to combat it.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The large majority of these songs are by Eastern European or American Yiddish writers.

<sup>28</sup> Prager, 'Paul Muni'; 'Der londoner farleger m. yozef', in *Oksforder yidish*, ed. Dovid Katz, vol. 2 (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991); Khone Shmeruk, 'Dray gasnlider; David Mazower, 'Stories in Song: The Melo-Deklamatsyes of Joseph Markovitch', in *New Approaches*, ed. Berkowitz, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Zelig Oberman, *In mayne teg* (London: Narod Press, 1947); Rocker and Ward, *London Years*; Thomas B. Eyges, *Beyond the Horizon: The Story of a Radical Emigrant* (Boston, Massachusetts: Group Free Society, 1944); Jacob Adler and Lulla Rosenfeld, *A Life on the Stage: A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1999); Lulla Rosenfeld, *Bright Star of Exile: Jacob Adler and the Yiddish Theatre* (New York: Crowell, 1977).; Joseph Markovitch, 'Fun mayne 50 yor in england', *IS* (1953-4); Boez Yong, *Mayn lebn in teatr* (New York: YK-Farband, 1950).

<sup>30</sup> Isaac Stone, *Eyn kurtse lebns bashraybung fun eyn londoner shnayder* (London: 1884); Nosn Berlin, *Di emese velt; oder eyn reyze in gehinem* (London, 1886). Both are translated into English in Prager, 'Yiddish Fiction in England', 256–309. Also Joseph Chaim Brenner, *Out of the Depths*, trans. David Patterson (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1992).; Jacob Shalom Katznelbogen, *A vinter nakht: in der ist-end fun london* translated from the Hebrew by A.B. Higer (London: Mazin & Co, 1908). Brenner

The lack of research on Anglo-Yiddish popular culture stands in striking contrast to American research into Eastern European and American Yiddish theatres. In addition to Nahma Sandrow's broad history, the backbone of the research is contained in two valuable edited volumes by Joel Berkowitz and Barbara Henry. They have gathered a wide selection of material that create a strong sense of the transnationalism of the Yiddish stage. In the introduction to the second volume Berkowitz states his intention to address the fluidity rather than the polarisation between *kunst* (high art) and *shund* (literally means 'trash'). This gave opportunities for researchers to write about music halls. Of particular interest to this thesis is Nina Warnke's pioneering work analysing the American Yiddish halls as contested locations, bitterly fought over in the *shund* debate. The relationship between the halls and acculturation is flagged up by Judith Thissen. Recent work includes Edward Portnoy's research on freaks and popular performers in Warsaw and Andrea Most's research on Jews in popular entertainment.<sup>31</sup> Most recent is Edna Nahshon's edited volume which includes some new detail on vaudeville.

There is also a significant amount of American research on song. This mainly concentrates on folk song that is not pertinent to this thesis, yet there is a fluid boundary between the folk and popular repertoires. Ethnomusicologist Ruth Rubin's analysis of Yiddish folksong includes theatre and popular song and puts it into the broad scope of Yiddish folk song from Eastern Europe. Mark Slobin displays the breadth of New York tenement songs, and briefly uses their context to describe elements of social history. Jack Gottlieb analyses the influence of Yiddish songs on contemporary American popular music. Irene Heskes and Lawrence Marwick compiled an inventory of

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made an earlier translation, but Higer (meaning 'a local') was a pseudonym which may or may not have been Brenner. See Prager, *Yiddish Culture*, 684.

<sup>31</sup> Joel Berkowitz, 'Introduction: Writing the History of the Yiddish Theatre', in *New Approaches*, ed. Berkowitz, 2003; Barbara Henry and Joel Berkowitz, *Inventing the Modern Yiddish Stage* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012); Nina Warnke, 'Immigrant Popular Culture as Contested Sphere: Yiddish Music Halls, the Yiddish Press, and the Processes of Americanization, 1900-1910', *Theatre Journal* 48, no. 3 (1996): 321-35; Nina Warnke, 'Patriot and Their Stars: Male Youth Culture in the Galleries of the New York Yiddish Theatre', in *Inventing*, ed. Henry and Berkowitz, n.d.; Judith Thissen, 'Liquor and Leisure: The Business of Yiddish Vaudeville', in *Inventing*, ed. Henry and Berkowitz, n.d.; Judith Thissen, 'Film and Vaudeville on New York's Lower East Side', in *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times*, ed. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Incorporated, 2013); Edward Portnoy, 'Freaks, Geeks, and Strongmen: Warsaw Jews and Popular Performance, 1912-1930', *TDR/The Drama Review* 50, no. 2 (2006): 117-35; Andrea Most, *Theatrical Liberalism: Jews and Popular Entertainment in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2013); Edna Nahshon, *New York's Yiddish Theater From the Bowery to Broadway*. (Columbia University Press, 2016).

published music-hall and popular songs, although there are a limited amount from before the First World War. This list was used by singer Jane Pepler who has uncovered and published some two hundred vaudeville songs from New York. Most recently, Abigail Wood analyses the American Yiddish revival and how old Yiddish songs changed to become part of present day American Jewish identity and culture.<sup>32</sup>

The Yiddish texts in this thesis sit alongside a wider English culture and are often influenced by that culture. In parallel with the Yiddish texts, the thesis draws on literature concerning the English milieu: socialist poetry and song, and the British music hall. The role of culture in a political context explores songs, chants, choruses and verse used for edification, propaganda and political activism.<sup>33</sup> The literature on the English music hall concerns the nature of the songs, censorship and the debates on alcohol and the morality of the halls.<sup>34</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones suggests caution when trying to pry

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<sup>32</sup> Ruth Rubin, *Voices of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979); Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs: The Popular Music of the Jewish Immigrants* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Jack Gottlieb, *Funny It Doesn't Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influences Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004); Irene. Heskes and Lawrence. Marwick, *Yiddish American Popular Songs, 1895 to 1950: A Catalog Based on the Lawrence Marwick Roster of Copyright Entries* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1992); Morris Rund, *American Yiddish Penny Songs: The Hebrew Union College Collection of Yiddish Broadsides 1895-1922*, ed. Jane Pepler (USA: Jane Pepler, 2015); Abigail Wood, *And We're All Brothers: Singing in Yiddish in Contemporary North America* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> The role of culture is particularly explored by Richard Middleton, 'Popular Music of the Lower Classes', in *The Romantic Age, 1800-1914*, ed. Nicholas. Temperley (London: Athlone Press, 1981); A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (London: Panther Books, 1969); Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870-1900; Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class', *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 4 (1974): 460-508; Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Ian Watson, *Song and Democratic Culture in Britain: An Approach to Popular Culture in Social Movements* (New York: Croom Helm, 1983); Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896', *History Workshop* 4 (1977): 5-56; Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987). For the changing view of culture in the writing of history, see Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> This thesis will particularly reference Peter Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture', *Past and Present* 144 (1994): 138-70; Peter Bailey, *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); Anthony Bennett, 'Music In The Halls', in *Music Hall: Performance and Style*, ed. Jacky Bratton (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); Jacky Bratton, *The Victorian Popular Ballad* (London: Macmillan, 1975); Dagmar Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class, and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Ronald Pearsall, *Victorian Popular Music* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973); Susan Pennybacker, 'It Was Not What She Said, but the Way That She Said It': The London County Council and the Music Halls', in *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure*, ed. Peter Bailey (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); Laurence Senelick, 'Politics as Entertainment: Victorian Music-Hall Songs', *Victorian Studies* 19, no. 2 (1975): 149-80; Penelope Summerfield, 'The Effingham Arms and the Empire: Deliberate Selection in the Evolution of Music Hall in London', in *Popular Culture and Class Conflict, 1590-1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure*, ed. Eileen Yeo and Stephen Yeo (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981); Jane Traies, 'Jones and the Working Girl: Class Marginality in Music-Hall Song 1860-1900', in *Music Hall: Performance and Style*, ed. Jacky Bratton and Ann

social history from music-hall songs. He does, however, argue that they are ‘both a reflection and a reinforcement of the major trends in London working-class life’.<sup>35</sup>

## **Methodology**

This thesis explores the themes of politics, sex and religion from poetry and song lyrics. The analysis of these texts and their place in Anglo-immigrant popular culture will be framed by three, sometimes overlapping, lenses. The first concerns how the texts contribute to political debates occurring in England and cultural controversies between different groupings of immigrant society. Second, is the way that the texts display aspects of acculturation to England, the extent to which they push an anglicisation agenda, and thus participate in the process of anglicisation. Thirdly, the analysis will include how texts contain the transnational nature of the London immigrant community, showing the transition between cultural worlds. Finally, there will be an acknowledgment of how some of these texts are changed by the nature of their performance, rather than as printed text that is read.

### ***Debate and cultural controversy***

Community debate and cultural controversy fill the lyrics of the songs and poetry. They indicate the importance of an issue or debate because they would not crop up unless they had already assumed considerable prominence. So ideas, both in the wider English sphere and in the internal immigrant culture, infuse these texts: the nature of work, working conditions, child prostitution, changing cultural mores around sexual relationships, the decline of religious observance and the nature of high and low-brow art. David Glover’s work provides the foundations of this claim, for it illustrates how literary texts of this era not only reflect politics but are significant agents in shaping debate. He examines how literature of fin-de-siècle England prepared the ground for political action, rehearsing some of the arguments that led to the 1905 Aliens Act. Glover considers this process as most dominant in Victorian fiction, but suggests that verse and music-hall songs also play a part.<sup>36</sup> This thesis argues that Anglo-Yiddish

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Featherstone (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1974).

<sup>35</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Penguin Books, 1971).

<sup>36</sup> David Glover, *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 10.

popular verse and song act as moments of discussion, pushing forward agendas in a variety of political and social spheres.

Creative texts do different work to prose, and poetic aesthetics alter the nature of intervention in debates. The strength of poetry is its ability to be a force in consciousness-raising where ‘political agency arises directly out of poetry’s creative capacities; its ability to imagine things differently’.<sup>37</sup> Thus the Yiddish verse and song lyrics offer an alternate way to engage in debate and suggest ideas for change. The contexts of socialist activism and music-hall atmosphere are necessary in understanding aspects of entertainment and critical comment the texts contain.

### ***Anglicisation***

The debate that ‘dominated’ the agenda of the established Jewish community of this period was the anglicisation of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants.<sup>38</sup> However, the understanding of what constituted anglicisation was contested and its limits were questioned. For the English community, depending on their political position, anglicisation was on a continuum from acculturation to English norms, to assimilation or conversionism. The Liberal party position was ambivalent. They had brought in Jewish emancipation releasing Jews from legal restrictions, yet were ‘less comfortable with the idea that emancipated Jews might still sustain collective and cosmopolitan ties’.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, the far right rhetoric of anti-Semites such as Arnold White and William Evans-Gordon demanded Englishness to be a ‘re-Christianisation of democracy’.<sup>40</sup>

Israel Zangwill’s short story ‘Anglicization’, portrays how the limits of anglicisation are tested. It argues that the definition of anglicisation by Jews and English Gentiles do not

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<sup>37</sup> Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>38</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 145–50.

<sup>39</sup> Eitan Bar-Yosef and Nadia Valman, ‘Between the East End and East Africa: Rethinking Images of “the Jew” in Late Victorian and Edwardian Culture’, in *The Jew in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture: Between the East End and East Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 8, 3–9. Bar-Yosef and Valman analyse the ambivalence around anglicisation and the variety of constructs of ‘the Jew’ held by English society.

<sup>40</sup> White believed that Jews undermined the confidence of working class English people, and that Jews should be English or go somewhere else. Glover, *Literature, Immigration*, 84–6. In responding to the pressure, the Anglo-Jewish establishment had chosen anglicisation rather than separatism, and had incorporated Anglican customs into synagogue services in decorum and dress. However, anglicising the waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe, who did not relate to an English establishment, presented a great challenge. See David Englander, ‘Anglicized Not Anglican: Jews and Judaism in Victorian Britain’, *Religion in Victorian Britain* 1 (1988): 252–68.



coincide. A Jew could be acculturated enough to fight in the Boer war risking death and saving an English soldier's life. He could be part of established English society and wish to marry a Christian. Yet ultimately, being a Jew was the stumbling block, and complete anglicisation did not include the Jew.<sup>41</sup> The story drew out the contested nature of the term between Jew and Gentile, yet the meaning of anglicisation within the Jewish community also varied greatly.

The Anglo-Jewish establishment saw the impoverished immigrants as coming from a backward culture and desired their urgent transformation, improvement and integration into English society. They wanted to eliminate Yiddish but preserve a strong Jewish identity and orthodox practice. To this end Anglo-Jewry set up and funded educational programmes to 'iron out the ghetto bend', charitable institutions to fund and encourage social mobility and move out of poverty, and welfare initiatives to stem the rise of anti-social behaviours.<sup>42</sup>

The desire for anglicisation also came from within the immigrant community. John Bodnar argues that immigrants to America were active participants constructing their new culture and 'forging' their own futures. He highlights the plurality in the diverse nature of the immigrant community, which brought a variety of approaches to their self-acculturation.<sup>43</sup> David Feldman draws particular attention to the contrasting ways that anglicisation was displayed in different sections of the Anglo-immigrant community.<sup>44</sup>

Socialists and anarchists saw immigrant workers as clinging to outmoded ideas that they needed to eschew in order to embrace modernity and fight for a socialist future. They were left-wing assimilationists and internationalists. They saw engagement with local

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<sup>41</sup> Israel Zangwill, 'Anglicization' in Jonathan Hess, Maurice Samuels, and Nadia Vaiman, *Nineteenth-Century Jewish Literature: A Reader* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 356–386. There is a patriotic Yiddish music-hall song about a Jewish soldier in the Boer war, dying a hero, saving his fellow soldiers and his country. Yet this song does not make the social comment Zangwill makes. Avrom Simironsky, 'Di boyern krig mit england', S.

<sup>42</sup> On Anglo-Jewry's anglicisation programme, see Black, *Social Politics*, 71–156; Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (New York: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 1992), 138–42. For anglicisation by the immigrant community, see Feldman, *Englishmen*, 329–52. These issues will be considered in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>43</sup> John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), xvi–xx, 205–9. It is important to acknowledge the difference between European countries and the USA. America, welcoming large quantities of newcomers, was more open to immigrants fitting congruent aspects of their heritage into the composite American culture than the immigrants coming to the mono-cultures of Western Europe.

<sup>44</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen*, 329–337. His arguments are applied to the next paragraphs.

radical politics and an understanding of international socialism to be part of a self-improvement programme. They offered political lectures, English classes and cultural entertainment. The early Yiddish socialist press, published in London, not only reported on current thinking about politics and modernity, but brought world literature to the immigrants through serialised Yiddish translations. One can argue that they only engaged with anglicisation as a step towards political revolution.

In another vein, anglicisation looked very different in the orthodox *Makhzike hadas* synagogue. The *Makhzike hadas* was established in 1898 as an amalgamation between a North London German synagogue and a large *khevre* (prayer society), to agitate for stricter communal orthodoxy. Yet it embraced a form of patriotism to Britain. It was not opposed to anglicisation as long as it was inclusive of strictly orthodox customs. It adopted liturgy that acknowledged a debt to Britain, yet continued teaching its children in Yiddish in the *khadorim* and *talmetyres* (religion schools).

Many ‘ordinary’ nominally religious Jews simply wanted their children to learn English so that they could move up the social ladder. They did not imagine that their children would become estranged from Jewish tradition. They welcomed the English ‘Board’ schools yet also sent their children to the religious *khadorim* to supplement their Jewish education.

Anglicisation had many faces depending on context. It could be revolutionary, patriotic, conversionist. It could be paternalistic, didactic or pragmatic. And it could be inconsistent, stressing the need to acculturate, yet desiring communal unity.<sup>45</sup> These conflicting ideologies and approaches give rich material for poems and songs to engage with these ideas through polemics, story and satire.

The use of the term anglicisation in this thesis is broad enough to incorporate these contested views. However, the most common usage implies acculturation. Acculturation is used to mean the incorporation of new identities from English culture without losing

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<sup>45</sup> For an examination of competing arguments: Lucien Woolf’s conception that Judaism had not suffered from modernity; Simon Dubnow’s anxiety that modernity would lead to assimilation, and Zygmunt Bauman’s view that modernity was a ‘doomed struggle’ as Jews were too particularist to conform to a nation’s view of uniformity, see David Feldman, ‘Was Modernity Good for the Jews?’, in *Modernity, Culture, and ‘the Jew’*, ed. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 171–6.

Jewish cultural identity. The term assimilation refers to the replacement of the old culture with the dominant English culture, what Philip Bohlman calls, in reference to music, the end of the migration process.<sup>46</sup>

The range of modes of anglicisation in the poetry and song depended on who was writing and performing the texts and the genre they were writing for: socialist activists writing poetry, libertine music-hall artists creating pop songs or mainstream traditional writers producing satire.<sup>47</sup> All the texts clearly come from England. They refer to local and national politics: internal workings of the East End Yiddish-speaking community, tensions between Anglo-Jewry and the immigrants and topical events of the wider English world. The texts embrace English culture and poke fun at those left behind in the old world. The texts grapple with the cultural clash with a mixture of nostalgia and defiance. Taken as a whole, the poetry and song can be viewed as a way for immigrant writers to encourage their own community to acculturate by participating in and adapting to life in England.

The Anglo-Jews saw Yiddish as a stumbling block to anglicisation,<sup>48</sup> so it may appear paradoxical to suggest that the Yiddish language of the popular texts was used as a force for anglicisation. Yet the Anglo-Yiddish texts expressed progressive ideas specific to English Diaspora life, and incorporated anglicised Yiddish words reflecting local parlance.<sup>49</sup> Yiddish, as spoken in London, can be seen as a bridge between identities, and therefore it became part of the medium of cultural transmission.<sup>50</sup> The Yiddish texts are conglomerates. They are not translations of English texts, even though writers may ape the style of English music-hall song or be influenced by a tradition of English poetry and satire. Yet they are also not identical to similar texts from Eastern Europe, even though they may share themes and cultural knowledge. The texts mix 'local

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<sup>46</sup> Philip. V. Bohlman, 'When Migration Ends, When Music Ceases', *Music and Arts in Action* 3, no. 3 (2011): 157.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of how this played out in American Yiddish culture see Warnke, 'Popular Culture'; Alyssa Quint, 'The Salon and the Tavern: Yiddish Folk Poetry of the Nineteenth Century', in *Inventing*, ed. Henry and Berkowitz, n.d.

<sup>48</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 174.

<sup>49</sup> Jerome Lawrence, in his biography of Paul Muni, describes the music hall of Sali and Filip Vayznfraynd, They would do a sketch from Goldfaden, but update it to include local references such as the London fog and Disraeli. Jerome Lawrence, *Actor, the Life and Times of Paul Muni* (London: W. H. Allen, 1975), 27.

<sup>50</sup> The parallels with the Yiddish spoken in America should not be overlooked. There are overlaps and borrowings between Yiddish Diasporas.

London colour' with elements of a common background in an Eastern European past, and, as such, mirror the complexity of how the immigrant was in a state of flux.<sup>51</sup>

Bodnar argues that the immigrants drew on the mores of the old country and created a new cultural reality incorporating old and new. Werner Sollors argues that the construction of an ethnic culture comes from the tension between the identity and culture one is born into and the one freely chosen.<sup>52</sup> They are both describing Americanisation which in itself was a fluid identity under construction, rather than the long established English cultural history. However, evidenced by the Anglo-Yiddish popular repertoire, aspects of Eastern European Yiddish 'old' culture get incorporated into the 'new' like a hook to draw in the audience with familiar ideas and experience. The way old and new cultures overlap in the texts on the one hand reveals alliances and influences between cultures. Yet on the other hand they display the clash of cultures, the lack of homogeneity and areas of conflict.

### ***Transnationalism***

In 2009 Moshe Rosman threw down a challenge to Jewish historians concerning their approach to the geography of Jewish history. In *Rethinking European Jewish History*, Rosman argues strongly for a regional viewpoint of what constitutes geography. Rather than seeing a unified wholeness in Jewish history across the world, and rather than focusing on the history of the Jews in one country, Rosman demands that we consider regionalism in our analyses of Jewish culture. He argues for the concept of *Ashkenaz* as a 'Jewish country'. Rosman argues that in seeing Jews as a global concept we miss the particular, yet by identifying Jews with one country we lose the transnational perspective. If we consider *Ashkenazi* culture as a region, we get a sense of the connections within the culture. He suggests:

The local context was only one context of the Jewish historical experience. Jewish experience was also contextualized within the frameworks of Jewish history, Jewish tradition, and the mutual influences of Jewish communities in various parts of the world.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The phrase 'local London colour' comes from Khone Shmeruk, 'Dray londoner yiddisher gasnlider fun far der ershte velt-milkhome' in *Studies in the Cultural Life of the Jews in England*, ed. Dov Noy and Issachar Ben-Ami (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975), 116.

<sup>52</sup> Bodnar, *Transplanted*, 185; Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1986), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Moshe Rosman, 'Jewish History Across Borders', in *Rethinking European Jewish History*, ed. Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2009), 28.

He contends that, even allowing for the heterogeneity of Jews from *Ashkenaz*, there is much in common. To ignore this is to ignore ranges of Jewish experience that make up the Jewish worlds within different countries. Rosman sees a transnational perspective in Jewish history as resembling ‘a rope with multicoloured strands all intertwined.’<sup>54</sup>

This approach has been the inspiration of later writers. American historian Daniel Soyer also suggests a transnational view of Jewish immigrant history. He reviews how Americanisation has been the focus of academic work on immigrant culture from two perspectives. One view analysed acculturation through examining how immigrants maintained the culture of Eastern Europe. A second view considered how immigrants invented a new diasporic culture different from the ‘Anglo-American mainstream’ and different from their old home cultures. Soyer argues that a transnational perspective offers a way of analysing how immigrants ‘participate in two societies in two geographical locations’ where they ‘negotiate complex interactions across borders and develop an identity that transcends those of both host and home society.’ This can be seen in immigrants’ involvement in the politics from Eastern Europe, in business links, sending aid and money and ongoing family communication. He suggests a ‘spectrum’ of transnational activity: from high commitment in travelling between locations to sending money to no transnational activity at all. Soyer’s argument is that a transnational perspective ‘complicates’ the analysis and challenges the centrality of the concept of Americanisation.<sup>55</sup> However, Soyer does not refer to the transnational nature of popular culture in his analysis.

A recent edited volume has taken up Rosman’s challenge head on, attempting explicitly to put an American Yiddish culture into a transnational perspective. It offers examples of transnationalism in economic, religious and publishing contexts, however it misses out on the Yiddish theatre.<sup>56</sup> Debra Caplan’s recent article on the Vilna Troupe steps into this gap. She splits transnationalism into structural, artistic and economic strands, defining her second strand as ‘the global circulation of aesthetic ideas’, and explores how the Vilna theatre troupe was influenced by aesthetic ideas as they travelled to

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–29.

<sup>55</sup> Daniel Soyer, ‘Transnationalism and Mutual Influence: American and East European Jewries in the 1920s and 1930s’, in *Rethinking European Jewish History*, ed. Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2009), 202–3, 205.

<sup>56</sup> Ava. F. Kahn and Adam. D. Mendelsohn (eds), *Transnational Traditions: New Perspectives on American Jewish History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014).

perform across the Yiddish world.<sup>57</sup> This thesis also attempts to show the variety of aesthetic influences on the songwriters and poets, but my methodology analyses the ways the lyrics of the texts inhabit that transnational aesthetics, and can be seen to reflect multiple locations simultaneously.

This use of transnationalism to explore music is a prevalent and ongoing debate within ethnomusicology. However, it is important to add a caveat. The current literature on transnationalism is devised for late modernity: a multicultural and digital age where sound is ubiquitous and cultures of text, image and sound can be moved instantaneously across the world. The world of this theory is of a different scale, magnitude and technology to that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the period this thesis covers, popular culture was harder to transmit and largely unrecorded.<sup>58</sup> The sound of song was only experienced through live singing, whether on the streets, in the workplace, in the *khevres* (prayer societies), in the home, in pubs, clubs, theatres and music halls. Poetry read in papers may have had a small audience, the poem surviving only until the next week's paper unless published elsewhere.<sup>59</sup> It was harder for culture to survive. Even if performance culture was not squashed through anglicisation, it was retained only in memory. So the question of whether the analytical approach devised for late modernity can be applied to high modernity is pertinent.

However, historian Ewa Morawska insists that current transnational theories can be applied to the 1881-1914 migrations, arguing that they are not new. She suggests that the 'straight line assimilation model' of migration has been long abandoned in favour of a theory of 'ethnicization', and that ethnicisation and transnationalism have much in common. Advances in transportation in the late nineteenth century allowed considerable to and fro and circular movement creating 'complex transatlantic networks of communication and assistance'. This entwining of identity and lifestyle in 'multilayered

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<sup>57</sup> Debra Caplan, 'Nomadic Chutzpah: The Vilna Troupe's Transnational Yiddish Theatre Paradigm, 1915-1935', *Theatre Survey* 55, no. 03 (2014): 301-7.

<sup>58</sup> The only recordings found are *Ich such a job*, performed by Yozef Sherman and the Pavilion Orchestra (London: Imperial, n.d.), vinyl 78; *Gevald, gevald Police*, performed by Fräulein Rubinstein (1905); from *Di Eybike Mame: Women in Yiddish Theatre and Popular Song*. (Mainz: Wergo, 2003), CD.

<sup>59</sup> There is a long history of publishing poems in newspapers, from at least the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. 'Millions' of poems were published during Victoria's reign in the local English press. Andrew Hobbs and Claire Januszewski, 'How Local Newspapers Came to Dominate Victorian Poetry Publishing.', *Victorian Poetry* 52, no. 1 (2014): 65-87.

environments,' has fluid boundaries and is 'never fully determined'.<sup>60</sup> Thus, using transnational theories can be a useful analytic tool.

Before current transnationalism theories, ethnomusicology research concerning migration and Diaspora has often focused on the concept of boundaries, borders and nation. It has explored migration from one country to another and analysed how this affects cultural output and identity. It has analysed how migrants carry their song material with them while adjusting it to the cultural context of the new country.<sup>61</sup> Ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes describes music as 'socially meaningful because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them.'<sup>62</sup> Philip Bohlman refines what the boundaries are. He argues that an 'aesthetic politics' of migration is a mixture of two discourses. One discourse concerns how 'authentic' music from the old country has symbolic power, and how this 'cultural baggage' can be used and adapted to the new culture. As the music changes it acculturates and assimilates into the host culture, which marks the end of migration. Bohlman also sets up an opposing discourse, where the loss of the home culture is seen as 'disjuncture' and 'displacement'. He suggests that the cultural impact of migration is the tension created between acculturation in the new country and the 'dispossession' from the old.<sup>63</sup>

Other ethnomusicologists also work within the polarity of old and new, but add refinements. Manuel Peña argues that acculturation does not happen without resistance, and cultural symbols are reinterpreted in new structures. Su Zheng argues that

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<sup>60</sup> Ewa Morawska, 'Immigrants, Transnationalism, and Ethnicization: A Comparison of This Great Wave and the Last', in *E Pluribus Unum? Contemporary and Historical Perspectives on Immigrant Political Incorporation*, ed. Gary Gerstle and John Mollenkopf (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 175–9. On the differences between current and past migrations and the use of transnational theories, see Leo Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat: The Integration of Old and New Migrants in Western Europe Since 1850* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 6–20.

<sup>61</sup> Diaspora has been a focus of other disciplines not covered here. Sociologist Stuart Hall stressed the need to see cultural identity as a never complete process that is incorporated into artistic forms of representation. He argued that the diaspora experience is defined by its heterogeneity, diversity and hybridity rather than by any essentialist or purist idea. These differences are the transformative power by which the diaspora identities are 'constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew'. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation', *Framework*, no. 36 (January 1989): 68. 78.

<sup>62</sup> Martin Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 4–5.

<sup>63</sup> Bohlman, 'Migration Ends'. An example of Bohlman's ideas can be seen in Parvati Nair, 'Voicing Risk: Migration, Transgression and Relocation in Spanish/Moroccan Rai', in *Music National Identity and the Politics of Location: Between the Global and the Local*, ed. Ian Biddle and Vanessa Knights (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, Limited, 2013).

transnational elements grafted onto local music both bring a sense of emancipation and give the music a complex and ambivalent meaning.<sup>64</sup>

This less divisible mix is one of the reasons that ethnomusicologists, social scientists and historians have emphasised a transnational approach. Anthropologists Nina Glick Schiller and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof argue that migration cannot be simply viewed as musicians moving from one territory to another and facing indigenous people in an ‘us and them’ situation. Rather, they argue for an approach that allows for the complexity of migrants inhabiting multiple locations. This perspective focuses on individuals relating to each other ‘within networks of relationships’:

A transnational social fields and network approach to migration facilitates research into the production of multiple simultaneous identities and gives us new entry points into the study of cultural production. Within this lens persons appear as actors in the mutual construction of the global, national and local. Actors can be understood as social citizens creating institutions of daily life across and within borders.<sup>65</sup>

Nadia Kiwan and Meinhof identify a range of *hubs* or transnational networks that support migrant musicians. These hubs may be people, spaces or institutions. Major cities of the world are at the interface of these hubs, and musicians often move between them, keeping meaningful contacts in all places. They suggest how these hubs help migrant musicians use ‘transcultural capital’ in their creative work.<sup>66</sup>

Although Kiwan, Schiller and Meinhof write about the movement of people, much ethnomusicology analyses texts for their transnational content. Gayatri Gopinath exemplifies this idea with bhangra as Diaspora pop music. Gopinath argues that it is ‘many texts at once... simultaneously available to recuperation within hegemonic constructions of identity, culture, and community’.<sup>67</sup> This suggests that the cultural text cannot be easily pulled into constituent parts, rather the influences on it create the originality of the artefact. The critical challenge thus shifted into questions of how to

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<sup>64</sup> Manuel Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1985), 13; Su Zheng, *Claiming Diaspora: Music, Transnationalism, and Cultural Politics in Asian/Chinese America* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 28.

<sup>65</sup> Nina Glick Schiller and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof, ‘Singing a New Song? Transnational Migration, Methodological Nationalism and Cosmopolitan Perspectives’, *Music and Arts in Action* 3, no. 3 (2011): 25. Schiller and Meinhof see this more recent approach as pertinent to the migrations of 1880s-1914 and returning to an older ‘transnational vision’.

<sup>66</sup> Nadia Kiwan and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof, ‘Music and Migration: A Transnational Approach’, *Music and Arts in Action* 3, no. 3 (2011): 7–8.

<sup>67</sup> Gayatri Gopinath, “‘Bombay, UK, Yuba City’”: Bhangra Music and the Engendering of Diaspora’, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 4, no. 3 (1995): 304.



define the various styles of cultural mix. Jan Sverre Knudsen argues that a ‘post-national perspective’ creates a more ‘varied, complex and ambiguous’ meaning that not only challenges the concept of *national* identity, but also identity in general.<sup>68</sup>

Researchers have long recognized it as problematically essentialist to separate out specific elements of culture according to the categories of politics. The question is one of boundaries. Mark Slobin argues that it is impossible to define a cultural boundary particularly in immigrant and Diaspora communities because no one expression of culture can define any individual group. He suggests that people live at the ‘intersection’ of three cultures: an embedded local subculture, an overarching regional superculture and a transregional interculture. These can be seen in immigrant societies in their connection to their new land of settlement, their old homeland and between Diasporas of their culture in other countries.<sup>69</sup>

The idea of Diaspora as an important identity marker is exemplified in the research of historian Rebecca Kobrin. She has researched the immigrant experiences of émigrés from the town of Bialystok. Some émigrés see themselves as torn from their lost homeland while others see themselves as part of a transnational Diaspora. Kobrin argues that, because Jewish migration happened with such speed, ‘new types of solidarities’ were forged through newspapers and organisations that kept the link to the homeland but were full of local concerns for the Diaspora locations. She looks at how the Jews in the different Diasporas of Bialystok did not consider their identity as being from Bialystok to be ‘erased’, instead their identity seemed to be ‘reinforced.’ Kobrin argues for the use of regionalism which is not limited by borders, and uses Bialystok to model how ‘Jewish migration brought global, national and local concerns into collision with one another’.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Jan Sverre Knudsen, ‘Music of the Multiethnic Minority: A Postnational Perspective’, *Music and Arts in Action* 3, no. 3 (2011): 79.

<sup>69</sup> Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (New England, Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 11–12. See also Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>70</sup> Rebecca Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 1–13. These theories connect with ideas of glocal which have a tangential relevance to this argument. See John Connell and Chris Gibson, *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity, and Place* (London: Routledge, 2003); Lisa Lowe, ‘Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences’, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 24–44; Timothy Craig and Richard King, eds., *Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002).

A number of ethnomusicologists use the contemporary term hybrid to describe the nature of migrant and Diaspora music. Mercedes Dujunco considers hybridity as mixing musical styles or performing in a language or instrument not associated with a particular music. She argues that the important of hybridity is in its effect of ‘breaking down conventional codes and expectations of order. Spatial, temporal and functional logics are skewed, raising an awareness of the heterogeneity, instability and non-synchronicity of things’.<sup>71</sup>

The transnational elements of the Anglo-Yiddish popular texts give them additional impact, and this thesis argues for the creative potential in including the transnational worlds that the poets, songwriters and performers inhabited, and how it infuses their creative works. The influences include the heterogeneity of the home country and the heterogeneity of the host country and the parallel Diasporas. London was a small Yiddish Diaspora yet there was overlap in immigrant experience between London and New York. Similarly, there was much in common with the Eastern European experience because cultural and generational change and modernisation were not only the preserve of the Yiddish Diaspora. Eastern European Jewish mores were also in flux.<sup>72</sup> Thus the Anglo-Yiddish popular texts held meaning throughout a wider realm than just in England. This thesis will build on these discussions to consider what particular transnational approaches are helpful in analysing the Yiddish popular texts of 1884-1914.

### ***Performance of the texts***

Although my focus is on text, and the close textual analysis of the published lyrics of the songs and poems, some of the texts would not have been accessed through reading on the page. Some poetry was performed to an audience or sung in groups, and popular songs were heard sung in Yiddish music halls.

Some socialist poems were read aloud at events or from the theatre stage. Those that were put to music became popular and transferred quickly from place to place, sung by

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<sup>71</sup> Mercedes Dujunco, ‘Hybridity and Disjuncture in Mainland Chinese Popular Music’, in *Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia*, ed. Timothy Craig and Richard King (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 28.

<sup>72</sup> For the growing divisions in Eastern European religious mores, see Stephen Sharot, *Judaism: A Sociology* (London: David & Charles Newton Abbot, 1976), 104.

workers in the workplace, in union meetings and demonstrations, and by choirs at socialist events. They became activist anthems and a part of workers' protest.<sup>73</sup>

Music-hall songs were performed in the music halls by local celebrities, sung in homes, clubs and workplaces. The performative aspect of the songs is vital in interpreting them, where the communication between performer and audience added to how the lyric was absorbed and understood. Peter Bailey has analysed this relationship in the British music hall, arguing that there is a collusion that happens between performer and audience that allows for a two-way communication to take place, which he calls *knowingness*. The performer uses familiar common language which lets shortcuts and under-statement create pathos and humour. The audience registers recognition through catcalls, shouts or laughter, asserting collective authorship.<sup>74</sup> In the Yiddish halls insider knowledge of transition and acculturation allowed for multiple layers of meaning.<sup>75</sup>

### **Introducing the Chapters**

The first chapter of this thesis contains a brief overview of Anglo-Jewish history of the period, offering the background needed to understand the location of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture. It focuses on the cultural controversies between Anglo-Jews and immigrants, and immigrant orthodox and socialist. It identifies Anglo-Jewish institutions and their attempts to support the immigrants and encourage anglicisation. The bulk of the chapter considers immigrant society, work and unions, religion, education and political ideologies.

The second chapter provides a history of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture. The Anglo-Yiddish popular poetry and song are positioned within both English and wider Yiddish culture. It examines the relationship between Morris Winchevsky and William Morris and their different approaches to socialist poetry, and explores how the structures of the English music hall pertained to its Yiddish equivalent. The chapter puts the texts into the framework of the Yiddish press and theatre and focuses on conflict and debate between different sections of the community concerning the quality of art.

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<sup>73</sup> Socialist song will be considered in detail in chapters two and four.

<sup>74</sup> Bailey, 'Conspiracies', 146.

<sup>75</sup> How Bailey's theory connects with the Yiddish music halls will be considered in chapters two and five.

Chapter three addresses the transnational nature of the texts. By focusing on a few texts in detail the layers and subtexts are revealed to show wide influences. The chapter argues that the interweaving of East End local, English national and wider Yiddish world are layered within the Anglo-Yiddish popular poems and songs.

Chapter four argues that Morris Winchevsky's attempts at being a *veker* (awakener) of the Jewish immigrant worker in London puts him in the centre of political debate. As a socialist internationalist, Winchevsky can be seen to epitomise transnationalism. He favours assimilation, yet can be seen to promote English acculturation as a first step out of religious identity and practice. Covering a large number of poems, the chapter identifies poetic strategies used in the cause of revolutionising the immigrant worker. This chapter also explores the use of music as a socialist tool.

Chapter five analyses how Yiddish music-hall songs transform sexual content to engage specifically with the immigrant experience of courtship, sex, marriage and transgressive sex. The songs are put into the perspective of debates occurring in the English public sphere around sexuality and prostitution. Emphasis is put on the performative nature of the songs, using Peter Bailey's theories of performer audience interaction.

The final research chapter suggests that religion is central in cultural controversy. Religious ideas are used and manipulated in the poems and songs to advance ideas about modernity and change. Change in the religious sphere is key to all writers, whether they want to abandon old forms completely, adapt them into something new or develop a non-religious cultural Judaism.

The conclusion draws from the research chapters in examining the different ways that anglicisation, transnationalism and cultural controversy are explored through the popular texts. It emphasises the original work that this thesis contributes to Anglo-Jewish historiography.

The appendices offer support in finding the primary sources, concise biographies of the personalities that appear in the story of Yiddish popular culture in Britain and images of primary source Yiddish texts.

## **Chapter 1: The Landscape of Jewish London 1880-1914**

The character of Anglo-Jewry changed dramatically between 1880 and 1914. The Jews who lived in England in 1880 were established and settled and unprepared for the changes that were to take place when unfamiliar immigrant paupers arrived *en-masse* from Eastern Europe. The Anglo-Jewish community was thrown into chaos, struggling to support their co-religionists. Both the Anglo-Jewish and immigrant sections of the community strived for the betterment, improvement and anglicisation of the immigrant population, yet their dissimilarities seemed too great a gap to cross. The differences in class, language, style of religion, outlook and political activism gave them little in common. It caused huge conflicts of interest and misunderstanding between them, and also highlighted rifts within the changing immigrant community.

These conflicts touched people's deepest beliefs, and were debated across both communities. Amongst the immigrant community the debate was in Yiddish, taking place in working men's clubs, in the Yiddish press, in *khevres* (prayer rooms), at home, on the street and in Yiddish theatres and music halls. The content of the poetry and songs makes interventions into these debates. The texts engage with revolutionary politics around the nature of work, clashes between ideology and religious practice, animosity between the Anglo-Jewish and immigrant communities around education and anglicisation and changes brought about by immigration to daily life and relationships. Without knowledge of the detail of the Jewish landscape of London, many popular texts are incomprehensible. This chapter offers a background history in order to provide the context vital in understanding the layers of local debate, ideas and experience contained in the popular songs and poetry.

### **The Anglo-Jewish Community**

By 1870 Anglo-Jewry was an upwardly mobile community, increasingly prosperous and middle class, with an exceedingly wealthy elite. The elite, consisting of established dynasties of families, financed and ran all the major Anglo-Jewish institutions. They held power in finance and business, and held civil and political positions. The largest section of the community were middle class white collar workers and professionals, and a small but growing working class were mainly poor immigrants from Poland and Russia. The East End of London contained all classes of Jews, but most of the elite had

moved to West London and the West End, and the middle classes were moving to North London. The working class, both Jewish natives and immigrants, remained the majority Jewish inhabitants of the East End.

The Anglo-Jewish elite felt they owed a debt of obligation to the country that had given them emancipation, and duty-bound to show how the Jewish community was indeed an *Anglo*-Jewish community composed of English people with English values and mores who were practising Judaism. As part of the struggle for acceptance the Anglo-Jewish elite tried to produce unity within the community, assisting all Jews to become middle class with English values. They began modernising existing institutions, and established a process of educational anglicisation.

The Jewish Board of Deputies had been set up in 1760 to represent the Jewish community to government agencies. Its role included regulating Jewish marriages for the state. The Board consisted of elected Deputies which, by 1879, represented twenty-seven orthodox synagogues from London and the provinces. The Board saw itself as ‘representative of the political interests of the entire community’. This view was shared by the government but not by the whole Jewish community.<sup>1</sup>

The Board of Deputies allied itself to the Chief Rabbinate, supporting its decisions on religious matters. Yet there were discordant elements. The West London Reform synagogue had been established in 1842 in an attempt to modernise and anglicise Jewish religious practice. Reform considered Anglo-Jewish orthodoxy as backward, outmoded and not sufficiently English. For many Anglo-Jews, Reform’s re-working of parts of the liturgy and religious practice were seen as heretical, and Reform was considered a threat to Anglo-Jewish power and authority. The Board of Deputies refused to allow any deputies to be elected from Reform. This position had been vigorously opposed by David Salomons, first Jewish Sherriff of the City of London, but the decision had only been reversed in 1874.<sup>2</sup>

Anglo-Jewish religious organisation was dominated by three large established London synagogues: the Great synagogue, the Hambro and the New Synagogue. As the community grew and synagogue members moved to West and North London, branches

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<sup>1</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 105–6.

<sup>2</sup> Finestein, *Changing Times*, 24–26.

of these synagogues were set up in those locations. The synagogues competed for members and some of their charity relief work was duplicated. In an attempt at unity, synagogues debated voting rights, style of prayer and control over new synagogues. In 1868 the United Metropolitan Congregation of Jews (the United Synagogue) was established. The United Synagogue tried to bring in a common orthodox style which engaged with modernity by modelling itself on the Anglican church. It walked a fine line, trying to be acceptable to the English Jews, the traditional orthodox and to be seen as English from outside. The liturgy was up-dated, making it more acceptable to Anglo-Jews yet keeping traditional synagogues in the fold.<sup>3</sup>

One problem with synagogue modernization was the lack of any provision in England to train ministers for the orthodox synagogues. Jews' College had been set up in 1855 to fill this gap, but it did not train rabbis who were experts in *halacha* (Jewish law), but reverends who would only pray and preach. It was not a popular choice of career because working in the ministry paid badly and parents (including Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler), who wanted their children to get a good Talmudic education, sent them to study abroad.<sup>4</sup>

Although Anglo-Jewish synagogues had charitable arms offering support to members, most immigrants were not members, being unable to afford the high synagogue fees and preferring to pray in *khevres*. Literally meaning association or society, these small, informal and gregarious *khevres* were prayer rooms or societies in the Russian Polish style of prayer. They had no representation in the United Synagogue or the Board of Deputies, despite the fact that by 1870 there were forty *khevres*. Poor immigrants were therefore unable to access charitable support. In 1859, the three East End Anglo-Jewish synagogues established the Jewish Board of Guardians, which was set up to provide relief to the Jewish poor who were not of their synagogue membership. They were particularly anxious to keep poor Jews out of the workhouse, where families were split up and it was impossible to keep kosher and the Sabbath. The Board's principal aim was to provide assistance that would stop people living on relief, giving an amount of money that would not simply be a palliative, but give them the means to move out of poverty. The Board offered a range of relief to immigrants who had been settled in the

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<sup>3</sup> Newman, *The United Synagogue, 1870-1970*, 1–14. See also Clark, *Albion and Jerusalem*, 173. 179. The Singer's Prayer Book of 1890 brought updated liturgy.

<sup>4</sup> Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 93–4.

country for six months and whose children attended school: loans, medical aid and apprenticeship schemes. They gave advice on sanitation and inspected homes to put pressure on landlords to fulfil their obligations for buildings maintenance.<sup>5</sup>

In 1841 two Anglo-Jewish newspapers were set up. The *Voice of Jacob*, with a Reform perspective, only lasted until 1848. The *Jewish Chronicle* became a ‘forum for debate’, encouraging democratisation and anglicisation, and being openly critical about Jewish organisations, in particular the Board of Deputies. It supported conciliation between the West London Reform synagogue and the Orthodox. Although the *Jewish Chronicle* reported on news and activities within the Anglo-Jewish community, it ignored anything to do with crime, and later socialist and anarchist culture, and did not mention the Yiddish press until 1887. The *Jewish World* was set up in 1873, reporting on those areas that the *Jewish Chronicle* left out, giving accounts of the Lipski and Jack the Ripper cases. It sought to increase readership by beginning to report on immigrant affairs, adding an occasional Yiddish supplement.<sup>6</sup>

During the 1880s a group of Anglo-Jewish intellectuals, unhappy with the unrepresentative nature of the Board of Deputies, met to explore how to ‘revitalise Jewish life through intellectual and cultural initiatives’. The Wanderers of Kilburn, led by Solomon Schechter and Israel Zangwill rebelled against the official Jewish community and what they felt was its lack of a dynamic centre. The Wanderers supported a magazine for youth called *Young Israel*, established amid the fear that as social mixing of Jewish and Gentile young people increased, so would out-marriage. *Young Israel* aimed at fostering a strong Jewish identity in Jewish youth. The Wanderers led to the creation of The Maccabeans, a group for Jews in the learned professions and arts. They ran events, lectures, discussions and balls, that the Jewish press covered in detail.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 76–86; Lipman, *Social History*, 27–9, 49–50, 60–9.

<sup>6</sup> David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 27–8, 79–81.

<sup>7</sup> Norman Bentwich, ‘The Wanderers and Other Jewish Scholars of My Youth’, *The Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions 1959-61* 20 (1964): 54; *The Jewish Dickens: Israel Zangwill and the Wanderers of Kilburn* (London: The Jewish Museum London, 1999), 3, 55–7; Madelyn Travis, “‘Both English and Jewish’: Negotiating Cultural Boundaries in *Young Israel*, 1897–1901”, *Victorian Periodicals Review* 46, no. 1 (2013): 119, 122.



The increase in out-marriage was a huge source of concern for the Anglo-Jewish community. Many of the old Sephardi community had assimilated through out-marriage, creating anxiety that the same would happen to the *Ashkenazi* community.<sup>8</sup> The Jews' College grammar school had closed in 1879 because traditionalists were against the teaching of secular subjects and emancipationists did not want a separate Jewish institution acting as a barrier to social equality. Although Nathan Adler had wanted Jewish education for all, others, including Salomons, thought that only the working class needed Jewish education, and middle and upper classes should be going to the City of London and University College schools. The Anglo-Jewish leadership sought to encourage mothers to transmit Jewish values to their children at home. Yet the majority of women were ill educated.<sup>9</sup>

Mainstream schooling for the working class Jews of the East End was seen as a major contributor to anglicisation. The Jews' Free School (JFS) was established long before emancipation to educate the Jewish poor and to train children as 'intelligent and useful members of society'.<sup>10</sup> With Moses Angel as its first Head Teacher, there were around 2000 pupils in the early 1850s, accelerating to nearly 5700 in the early 1880s. Pupils were largely immigrants or children of immigrants, and the school's mission was to 'turn their children into English boys and girls'.<sup>11</sup> Rich in its praise for the Jews' Free School, the *Jewish Chronicle*, explained that the school provided immigrant children with a 'bridge by which mentally and morally, they may pass from Russia to England'.<sup>12</sup>

The 1870 education Act had established the first system of non-denominational primary schools and Local Education Board schools were introduced. Many immigrant parents were reluctant to send their children to the Board schools because they associated state

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<sup>8</sup> The *JC* wrote virulently against marrying out. Henry de Worms had to resign his presidency of the Anglo Jewish Association when he sanctioned his daughter's Anglican wedding. Arthur Cohen, not orthodox, resigned the presidency of the Board of Deputies when his daughter out-married. Clark, *Albion and Jerusalem*, 203.

<sup>9</sup> Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 93; Finestein, *Victorian England*, 34; Finestein, *Changing Times*, 99. The writer Amy Levy depicted Jewish middle-class women as airheads, poorly educated, individualistic, playing cards. See Amy Levy and S. Bernstein, *Reuben Sachs* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> David Salomons talking at a JFS dinner in 1846 in Israel. Quoted in Finestein, *Changing Times*, 33. Zangwill, in *Children of the Ghetto* describes how 'the bell of the great Ghetto school ... [was] calling them to come and be anglicized.' Israel Zangwill and Meri-Jane Rochelson, *Children of the Ghetto: A Study of a Peculiar People* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 95.

<sup>11</sup> Lipman, *Britain since 1858*, 29.; *JC*, 14 September 1888, quoted in Gerry Black, *JFS. The History of the Jews' Free School, London since 1732* (London: Tynsder Publishing, 1998), 88.

<sup>12</sup> *JC* 9 May 1884, 11-12. Quoted in Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, 78.

schools with a missionary purpose. Angel advised removing references to Christianity and appointing Jewish Headteachers and teaching staff. The English School Boards kept a ‘hands-off’ approach, leaving leeway for schools to ‘subvert and ignore’ policies of the School Board to accommodate Jewish pupils.’ East End board schools became largely Jewish, with the Old Castle Street School having 1500 Jewish pupils at its height.<sup>13</sup>

Another factor that worried parents was that the JFS and Board schools only taught basic Jewish religion classes, the majority of the curriculum being secular studies. Religious and traditional immigrant parents were anxious that their children were not receiving a rigorous enough religious education. Even parents who were nominally religious, but not regular synagogue attendees, worried that their children would lose their cultural heritage that they no longer practised. Many parents would have been educated in *khadorim* and *talmtoyres* in Eastern Europe, where the standard of learning went beyond the Anglo-Jewish equivalent taught at the JFS and Board schools. This anxiety was addressed within the immigrant community by setting up a system of *khadorim* and *talmtoyres* in the East End to run alongside regular schools. They taught Hebrew, Jewish texts and prayers, with all teaching conducted in Yiddish. Financed entirely by the immigrants themselves, many small *khadorim* ran before and after school until late in the evenings and on Sundays, and were for all ages of children.<sup>14</sup>

The smaller private *khadorim* for younger children were taught by a rabbi or *melamed*, were sometimes attached to a *khevre*, and were often housed in kitchens and front rooms in cramped conditions for handfuls or dozens of boys. The earliest *Talmtoyre* for older children opened in Great Garden Street in 1881. Angel led a ‘crusade’ against Yiddish and the system of *khadorim* and *talmtoyres*, seeing them as obstacles to the JFS’ ‘transformative process’. He asked the Jewish Board of Guardians to inspect them, which they did in 1881. However, apart from overcrowding, the reports were favourable.

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<sup>13</sup> Suzanne Kirsch Greenberg, ‘Anglicization and the Education of Jewish Immigrant Children in the East End of London’, in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven Zipperstein J. (London: Peter Halban, 1988), 115–6, 149; Black, *JFS*, 118; Benjamin Lammers J., ‘The Citizens of the Future: Educating the Children of the Jewish East End, C. 1885-1939’, *Twentieth Century British History* 19, no. 4 (2008): 398.

<sup>14</sup> The government gave financial aid to the JFS on condition they change the ratio of secular studies to Jewish studies, substantially decreasing Jewish studies classes. Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 222–34.

The system of *khadorim* that Angel was fighting, rather than diminishing, greatly increased with the onset of waves of Eastern European immigrants after 1881.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Mass Immigration from Eastern Europe**

The 1881 Eastern European landscape can be split into three parts. The Russian Empire included what had been the Kingdom of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and part of Ukraine. The Austro-Hungarian empire included Galicia, and the third part was Prussia (Germany). In 1881 there were over four million Jews in the Russian Empire, one million of whom lived in what had been the Kingdom of Poland. Most Russian Jews were legally compelled to live in the Pale of Settlement, and of the nearly three million living in the Pale, 80 per cent lived in towns and the rest in the countryside. Only 0.1% lived in towns in the Russian interior, Moscow and St Petersburg.<sup>16</sup>

Immigration had been constant since the 1850s and by the late 1870s it became clear that the rate of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe was slowly but steadily increasing. This was largely due to worsening economic conditions in the Pale. Famine in north east Russia, persecution in Romania and the Odessa Pogrom of 1871 with its ongoing civil unrest motivated Jews to leave. There had been a huge population increase, yet employment opportunities were shrinking. The widespread construction of railroads and the changes in the law concerning alcohol targeted Jewish tavern keepers and merchants involved with the sale of alcohol. The importance of fairs diminished, affecting Jewish traders, and in urban areas competition increased, and ‘the Pale became choked by a huge pauperized mass of unskilled or semi-skilled Jewish labourers, whose economic condition steadily worsened’. Although Jews in Austrian Galicia had more equality, economic depression left them in an appalling situation, often in tiny isolated poverty-stricken communities.<sup>17</sup>

In March 1881 Tsar Alexander II was assassinated by an anarchist group. Amongst the group was a Jewish woman, Gesia Gelfman, which led to rumours of the Jews killing the Tsar. There was a wave of pogroms, fuelled by the anti-Semitic press that continued

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 233–4. Later *talmetoyses* included Commercial Road in 1898, Bethnal Green and Dalston. Levin, ‘The Changing Pattern of Jewish Education’, 65; Black, *JFS*, 126; Tananbaum, *Immigrants in London*, 92–6.

<sup>16</sup> John Klier, ‘Russian Jewry on the Eve of the Pogroms’, in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. Shlomo Lambroza and John Klier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 5–7. See also Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 127–30.

over the summer, spreading to Warsaw by the end of the year. The May Laws of the following year prohibited Jews from living or owning property in the countryside, forcing the Jewish population into already over-crowded towns and accelerating emigration.<sup>18</sup>

Most immigrants set their hopes on the New World following the end of the American civil war. Emigration was further encouraged by letters arriving with money from family members who had already emigrated. This tended to have a stronger effect than newspaper advertisements in the Eastern European press which tried to dissuade people from settling in England due to the acute poverty they would find there. By the 1880s immigration changed from a steady trickle to large waves.<sup>19</sup>

It is impossible to ascertain precisely how many Jews came to Britain between 1881 and 1914, partly because the Board of Trade only started collecting figures from 1890, and did not distinguish who were Jews, and partly because many transmigrants on route to America were counted in the figures if they had no through-ticket. The figures in the press were exaggerated, yet census data is unreliable because censuses were often deliberately not filled in. There were waves of immigrants, with peaks in 1881-82, 1896 and 1899, steadily rising until a high in 1903-6 after which the Aliens Act started to take effect, with another peak just before the first world war. The range was 3-8000 immigrants a year, however three times this number disembarked. 60-70 per cent settled in London, increasing the Jewish population to around 180,000. The majority of immigrants not settling in London joined Jewish communities in Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Glasgow and Birmingham.<sup>20</sup>

After 1881 the Board of Guardians found themselves overwhelmed by the demand for poor relief and a separate Mansion House fund was established to help refugees fleeing persecution. Immigrants were looked after on arrival, protected from dockside imposters, given furniture, tools, clothing and other house necessities and opportunities

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<sup>18</sup> Simon Dubnow termed the May Laws 'legislative pogroms' seeing the authorities' motivation to be blatantly anti-Jewish. Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, trans. Israel Friedlaender, vol. 1, 1860-1941 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2000), 357.

<sup>19</sup> Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 24-6. For 'push pull' theories see Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 20-7.

<sup>20</sup> Lipman, *Britain since 1858*, 45-6; Bernard Gainer, *The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905* (London: Heinemann, 1972), 3-6; Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 127-30.

to learn trades. By 1891 the Mansion House Fund money was used up, and the Russo-Jewish Committee was formed to take over dealing with the influx of refugees. Their aim was to anglicise the immigrants as quickly as possible so that they would not be reliant on charitable support.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time as providing charitable support, both the Board of Guardians and the Russo-Jewish Committee put energy into trying to stem the tide of immigrants. The Board of Guardians put advertisements and warnings in the Eastern European Jewish press describing the torment of finding work in England and discouraging them from coming. They made arrangements with committees on the continent to encourage Russian emigrants not to come to London. The Russo-Jewish Committee tried to send refugees onwards to America, where they felt they would have better prospects of finding work and housing. However, as the waves of immigrants arriving in London during the 1880s accelerated, the Anglo-Jewish response could not keep up and reached a crisis point.<sup>22</sup>

In a continuing effort to deter immigration, the Board of Guardians opposed private initiatives set up to help Jewish immigrants. In 1885 the baker Simcha Becker, a Polish refugee, set up a shelter with housing, kosher food and a prayer room for refugees. The Board closed it down claiming it was ‘unhealthy’ and that ‘such a harbour of refuge must tend to invite helpless foreigners to this country’.<sup>23</sup> The Board was supported by the *Jewish Chronicle* editor Asher Meyer who claimed in an editorial that the shelter would encourage ‘loafing’ and ‘idleness’ and that ‘more and more foreign Jews ... would be enticed to this country only to live a life of degradation and beggary’.<sup>24</sup> Becker, however, was a ‘folk-hero’ amongst the immigrants, and the action against him caused an outcry, leading Samuel Montagu, Liberal MP for Whitechapel and other leading members of the Anglo-Jewish elite to set up the Poor Jews Temporary Shelter.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lipman, *Social Service*, 89, 78–9.

<sup>22</sup> Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 24–6; Lipman, *Social Service*, 93; Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, 70.

<sup>23</sup> Jewish Board of Guardians minutes. Quoted in Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 116.

<sup>24</sup> Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, 71.

<sup>25</sup> Alderman, *Federation of Synagogues*, 8. The Board of Guardians were also unhappy with the Poor Jews Temporary Shelter and tried to impose terms on it which the Shelter refused to adhere to. After 1890 the Shelter and the Board worked along parallel lines helping immigrants and transmigrants alike. Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 116–7.

The immigrant society brought with it a level of vice and criminality that the Anglo-Jewish community had never seen before. Immigration sometimes led to deserted families and growing delinquency among immigrant youth.<sup>26</sup> The most worrying form of criminal activity involved incidents of procuring for the white slave trade and prostitution. The white slave trade procurers abducted young women and sold them to brothels across the world. This occurred with young Jewish women both in London and in parts of Eastern Europe. In Galicia, the acute poverty and dearth of men to marry local Jewish girls made procuring easy. Jewish procurers would pose as suitors, and under the pretext of a secret marriage, would lure young women to Europe and onwards to other countries.<sup>27</sup> There were also procurers waiting at the London dockside for girls travelling alone, offering counterfeit assistance and luring them into an East End brothel. The Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women (JAPGW) was set up in 1885 by women from leading London Anglo-Jewish families.<sup>28</sup> It set out to protect women and reduce the white slave trade by publicising its existence and making East European communities aware of the dangers by advertising in Yiddish newspapers.<sup>29</sup> They made a visible presence at the dockside, boarding ships to find women travelling alone or with male non-family members. They would escort women to their addresses, and if these addresses were suspicious, they would offer protection. The JAPGW's work was also to support fallen women as part of their aim of 'redemption', and they set up a number of institutions, including Charcroft House and Sarah Pyke House, where women could be rehabilitated. The JAPGW was a model for similar initiatives in Jewish communities across the world.<sup>30</sup>

The immigrants were not only supported by Anglo-Jewish charities, but also by self-help from immigrant entrepreneurs, such as Simcha Becker, charitable arms of *khevres* and Friendly Societies. Within an ethos of improvement and integration, political

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<sup>26</sup> Jewish Girls and boys' clubs were established to try and counter this trend: the Jewish Lads Brigade (1895), The Brady St Club (1896), Stepney Lads Club (1900). They encouraged anglicisation, fitness and health, preparing young women for wife and motherhood. Tananbaum, *Immigrants in London*, 109–15; Feldman, *Englishmen*, 310; Robert Voeltz, "'A Good Jew and a Good Englishman": The Jewish Lads' Brigade, 1894-1922', *Journal of Contemporary History* 23 (1988): 119–20.

<sup>27</sup> Bristow, *Prostitution, Prejudice*, 85–108. Bristow gives an international view of Jewish involvement in the White Slave Trade. For Anglo-Jews' attempts to fight against the Trade, see *Ibid.*, 236–45.

<sup>28</sup> Originally called the Jewish Ladies Society for Preventive and Rescue Work, but changed its name in 1897 when men got involved with the organisation. Lipman, *Social Service*, 247–8.

<sup>29</sup> In 1890 notices were published in Jewish newspapers in Eastern Europe 'warning young girls from leaving their homes by the advice of strangers or under the care of strangers'. Gartner, 'International Traffic', 143.

<sup>30</sup> Knepper, 'Racialisation of Crime', 67–9. See also Marks, 'Race, Class and Gender', 31–50; Black, *Social Politics*, 232–5.

activists, who were socialist and anarchist internationalists, wanted to unite workers and revolutionise their position, and trade unionists wanted to improve daily conditions in the major forum of all immigrants, that of the workplace.

### **Work and Unions in the Immigrant East End**

Most immigrants worked in production. Over a half of male workers in London working in tailoring, with others in footwear and furniture workshops. The commonly used term to describe the way these industries functioned was *sweating*. The House of Lords Select Committee on Sweating of 1890 shied away from calling sweating a *system*, describing it as a number of symptoms such as long hours, low wages and overcrowded and insanitary conditions.<sup>31</sup> These symptoms, however, can be seen as the result of an interaction between three different systems: the process of subcontracting work from wholesaler to sweater, the sub-division of labour to increase output at a lower cost, and the seasonal nature of these particular industries.

Sub-contracting was the process of repeatedly contracting out jobs of work from wholesalers, to sub-contractors and small workshops in order to make garments at the cheapest possible rate. A West End wholesale tailoring firm would get an order from a retailer, buy the cloth, cut it and give it to sub-contractors for a deposit. The sub-contractor would receive a fixed price per piece returned by a certain time, so he would contract the work out to his own workshop or masters in other workshops, who may, in turn, sub-contract to smaller workshops, and to home workers.<sup>32</sup> As the workshops taking the work became smaller and smaller, based in cellars, kitchens, back-rooms or out-houses, it became easier for the master to disregard restrictions, demanding longer hours, a fast pace of work and very poor working conditions. This was possible because government inspections became less enforceable.<sup>33</sup> The 1894 report by the Chief

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<sup>31</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 130; David Feldman, 'The Importance of Being English. Jewish Immigration and the Decay of Liberal England', in *Metropolis, London: Histories and Representations since 1800*, ed. David Feldman and Gareth Stedman-Jones (London: Routledge, 1989), 66.

<sup>32</sup> Rudolf Rucker explains. 'It was a vicious circle, each trying to squeeze as much as possible out of those under them.' Rucker and Ward, *London Years*, 89–90. By the late 1880s over 1000 small workshops in London each had a handful of workers. In 1888 Charles Booth counted 571 workshops making coats in less than one square mile around Whitechapel. 70% employed fewer than 10 workers, and only 3% over 25. Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 135.

<sup>33</sup> James Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries and Sweated Labor: The London Clothing Trades, 1860-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 3. Factories had more rigorous inspections than workshops, so workshop masters would ensure they had less than the 50-worker limit. The 1871 Workshop Act split responsibility for inspection between central government agencies and local authority. This meant enforcement was weak and many more small workshops were set up. Later Acts of 1895 and 1901

Inspector of Factories and Workshops describes how sweaters managed to contravene workshop laws by opening more hours than they should on both Saturdays and Sundays, and how women would pretend to be family members to make the workshop appear to be a domestic workshop.<sup>34</sup>

There was a plentiful supply of unskilled labour due to the waves of newly arrived Jewish immigrants looking for work. Demand for unskilled labour was increased by the system of subdivision of tasks. Rather than one well paid skilled craftsman completing a whole item, jobs were sub-divided between different workers, creating unskilled work that could be done by poorly paid less experienced workers assisted by new machinery to help the process.<sup>35</sup> It was easier to split the process of making a garment into small jobs: sleeves, cuffs, pockets, fixing, basting and pressing. Some of these jobs were skilled, and many unskilled. A small workshop would be a hierarchy of contracted and subcontracted workers. In a tailor's workshop the contracted workers who had permanent jobs would include a machinist, a presser and a baster or general tailor to do cutting and basting, and under them would be sub-contracted, sub-pressers, plain machinists, and a range of unskilled workers, buttonhole-makers and finishers often women and boys who only had to become proficient at one task.<sup>36</sup> By 1888 tailoring had been subdivided into at least twenty-five divisions', a development that was seen as a Jewish immigrant innovation forming the basis of the new ready-made clothing industry.<sup>37</sup>

The difficulties of making a living wage were exacerbated by the seasonal nature of the sweated trades, connected to when consumers were buying items, mostly clothing and shoes.<sup>38</sup> Busy times in the Jewish trades were October to December and March to April

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tightened up the system. In order to by-pass these regulations by the mid 1990s unregulated outwork and homework increased. Ibid., 135–49.

<sup>34</sup> Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops for the Year (1894 [C.7745] XIX (1895)) 46–47. Quoted in David Englander, ed., *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), 121.

<sup>35</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen*, 193–4. Some division of labour was due to new power-driven machinery used in factories which needed less labour.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Godley, *Jewish Immigrant Entrepreneurship in New York and London, 1880-1914: Enterprise and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 100–1.

<sup>37</sup> Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries*, 27–8, 104. See also C. Russell and Harry Samuel Lewis, *The Jew in London: A Study of Racial Character and Present-Day Conditions* (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1900), 68; Beatrice Potter, 'The Tailoring Trade and The Jewish Community', in *Life and Labour: East London*, ed. Charles Booth, vol. 1 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1889), 212–3.

<sup>38</sup> The English busy season differed: when the wealthy returned to town in February and March, needing clothing for the fashionable season in the middle of April. There was a trough in August when they left London for holidays, and another peak as they returned in October, November coinciding with the



in the run up to Passover. During slack times many workers were laid off, with only some skilled workers kept on in the workshop. This left much of the workforce in 'casualized limbo' thrown onto finding bits of work in an 'already overfilled general unskilled labour market', taking to hawking with barrows and street trading or reliant on savings or charity relief. Some years had additional pressures, with trade depressions and severe winters when the Thames froze. This affected dock workers jobs, whose wives would take on homework to help the family income: this in turn would increase competition for the immigrants working in the sweated trades.<sup>39</sup>

Jewish Women were conspicuous in the workplace. As well as in the sweated industries they worked in shops and market stalls, and from their homes, and many took in lodgers. It was common for a woman to work before marriage and in widowhood, and to supplement her husband's income during the slack season.<sup>40</sup> However, women were paid significantly less than men and were rarely in skilled jobs. In tailoring workshops they were almost never cutters or pressers, generally working in the lower skilled jobs as basters, fellers and buttonhole makers. The lowest paid women's work was homework. This consisted of finishing garments that required little training, no machinery, with barely sufficient pay to support one person.<sup>41</sup>

Within the sweating system there were two forms of payment often running alongside each other: payment by time (hour or day) and payment by the piece. Machiners and pressers, wanting to work fast, were paid by the piece, but basters were paid by the hour. This made it difficult for the immigrants to form unions representing everyone, so that during 1889, rather than unity, separate unions of machinists and pressers emerged.<sup>42</sup>

During the 1870s English national unions dominated the three main industries in which Jews worked: cabinet makers, tailors and boot and shoe makers. Jews could join the English unions, though few did. The English trade union movement was small, there was no tradition of multi-ethnicity in English life and no precedents for political

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reopening of parliament, and the necessity of buying winter clothing. All trades, seasonal or not, had a slack period after the Christmas consumer boom. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 34–5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 43–8.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen Ross, 'Fierce Questions and Taunts' Married Life in Working Class London, 1870-1914', in *Metropolis, London*, ed. Feldman and Stedman-Jones, 224. Ross argues that the husband as wage earner established his position as husband, but wage earning was a precarious position and if he was not earning, that position could be contested bringing with it 'intolerable domestic tensions'.

<sup>41</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 133; Kershner, *Uniting the Tailors*, 114–5.

<sup>42</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen*, 236.

organisation based on a foreign language. English trade unionists claimed that Jewish immigrants were difficult if not impossible to unionise and were not good unionists when they did.<sup>43</sup> Immigrant workers were believed to undercut native workers by being prepared to work for so little, ‘destroying English trade union organisation and thereby reducing native workers to the alien’s level.’ It was suggested that Jews were unused to British institutions, ignored union officers’ instructions, went on strike without authority, were riven by political disputes between socialists and anarchists and did not want to join unions because they wanted to become masters. It was apparent that Jewish workshop masters and workers aligned with religious, kinship and community ties of loyalty, and that this made unionisation unpopular. Women were often isolated in their homes or tiny workshops ‘beyond the reach of labour organisations’, and due to seasonal work in the sweated trades workers were often out of work.<sup>44</sup>

A major reason for the reluctance of Jews to join unions was that they were eager for upward mobility. Eugene Black argues that the constant supply of unskilled immigrants not only pushed established workers out of their jobs, but often pushed them ‘upwards into more skilled, supervisory, even entrepreneurial roles.’ This prevented workers organising for improvement in basic wages and working conditions.<sup>45</sup> One way to minimise the effect of seasonal fluctuations was for a worker to become an entrepreneur, which was a higher risk activity than its alternative, wage earning labour and it required capital. Jewish immigrants were given substantial assistance in this enterprise.<sup>46</sup>

An immigrant could aspire to become an entrepreneur by saving a little and taking a loan from the Jewish Board of Guardians in order to hire essential tools, such as a sewing machine, pressing iron and so on, and setting up a workshop. These ‘small units developed in symbiosis with factory production and an expanding market.’<sup>47</sup> Beatrice Potter described this as so commonplace among the immigrants, that it was ‘proverbial’ that ‘with £1 in his pocket any man may rise to the dignity of a sweater.’ He would begin by living on green labour, then employ a machinist and presser. The new master might earn little more than those he employed, but even if he earned less, he was more

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<sup>43</sup> Harold Pollins, *Economic History of the Jews in England* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982), 152; Frankel, *Prophecy*, 121; Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries*, 107; Russell and Lewis, *The Jew in London*, 84.

<sup>44</sup> Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, 31; Pollins, *Economic History*, 153; Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries*, 187.

<sup>45</sup> Black, *Social Politics*, 200.

<sup>46</sup> Godley, *Immigrant Entrepreneurship*, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen*, 246.

likely to be in work during the slack season. The ease of movement from worker to master increased competition and often pitched masters back into the ranks of workers.<sup>48</sup>

The drive towards upward mobility is seen by Eugene Black as a Jewish working class drive for independence. Feldman, however, warns against too simplistic a view, arguing that it is important to see the push for upward mobility, not as an entrepreneurial spirit of the Jewish immigrant, rather the 'effect of their access to small capital'. The desire for upward mobility was not tied to Jewish ethnicity, but stemmed from the adverse conditions experienced as a worker. Rather than having a clear goal, saving every shilling and building up to being able to move upwards, entrepreneurs in small enterprises were assisted by capital available to the Jewish immigrant worker, which gave them greater security and the possibility to resist poverty.<sup>49</sup>

Those who succeeded as masters often moved out of the East End and became what Bill Williams calls an 'alrightnik'. The alrightnik' sat in the class system between the established Anglo-Jewish middle class, 'native Jews', and the immigrants. He wanted to be a player in the community and began to sponsor immigrant organisations: *landmanshaften*, Friendly Societies, *khevres*, paying for the salary of rabbis to be brought over from the *heym* (mother-country). The 'alrightnik' rose to a management position within immigrant society.<sup>50</sup> Upwardly mobile 'alrightniks', however, were often not in good favour with the Anglo-Jewish establishment who saw their leadership position and power in the community as a direct threat. Simcha Becker's shelter had not only been seen as a threat to who holds the power in the immigrant community, but also the alrightnik's desire to support a Yiddish-speaking community was seen as contrary to the Anglo-Jewish push for anglicisation.

Despite the push for upward mobility and the reluctance of many Jewish workers to join trade unions, between 1872 and 1915 thirty-six independent Jewish tailoring trade unions were formed. If the Jewish branches of the English Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses are counted, then the figure rises to over fifty. In 1889 and 1890 and again in 1912, there was successful mass strike action by Jewish workers. Yet many

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<sup>48</sup> Potter, 'The Tailoring Trade and The Jewish Community', 232–3; Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> Black, *Social Politics*, 200; Feldman, *Englishmen*, 246–51.

<sup>50</sup> Williams, 'East and West', 21.

of these Jewish trade unions were short-lived, some lasting months, some years, and only two survived a decade.<sup>51</sup>

Union activism amongst the immigrants was largely led by Russian Jewish socialists whose main aim was revolution across the Yiddish-speaking world. The fight for better working conditions was seen as important by the socialists but it was only a starting point for revolutionary talk.<sup>52</sup> Aaron Lieberman, a socialist militant from Grodno who had been involved in revolutionary activities in Eastern Europe, arrived in London in 1875. In 1876 he established the Agudah Hasozialistim Chaverim, the first Hebrew Socialist Union aiming to start a movement that included Jewish and non-Jewish socialists and improve the lot of Jewish workers in London. He was outspokenly anti-religious, which backfired with orthodox and traditional workers. A mass meeting where he preached against the religious establishment decrying the fact that many poor Jews could not afford to marry, was infiltrated by anti-socialists who accused him of being a conversionist, led to a full scale fight and the police had to be called in. The use of the term 'conversionist' spread alarm in the orthodox community who already saw the numbers of orthodox Jews depleting, and had to put up with missionary activity across the East End offering help and support to impoverished workers. In despair of organising in London, Lieberman left for Germany and later New York.<sup>53</sup>

Morris Winchevsky offered a different approach to Lieberman. A socialist activist, journalist and poet from Lithuania, he arrived in London in 1879. Although influenced by Lieberman he was less dogmatic in his approach, wanting to interpret socialist ideas and practice in a language that workers could understand and relate to.<sup>54</sup> In 1884 he and Elye Rabbinowitch set up the *Poylishe yidl* (later called *Tsukunft*), the first Yiddish left-wing newspaper in London aimed at newly arrived Yiddish-speaking immigrants, giving advice on looking for work and an idea of what was going on in the world.<sup>55</sup> However, after fourteen issues, Winchevsky was unhappy with Rabbinowitch's ideological stance accepting an advertisement from Samuel Montagu, who was both orthodox and a part of the Anglo-Jewish elite, so left to found the *Arbayter fraynd*. The

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<sup>51</sup> Kershen, *Uniting the Tailors*, 127.

<sup>52</sup> Frankel, *Prophecy*, 118–9.

<sup>53</sup> Rocker and Ward, *London Years*, 50–56; Fishman, *Radicals*, 97–134; Frankel, *Prophecy*, 29–41.

<sup>54</sup> Rocker and Ward, *London Years*, 57; Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>55</sup> Winchevsky, editorial *PY*, 25 July 1884.

*Arbayter fraynd* included articles on sweated trade and capitalist exploitation with the aim to raise consciousness and create a socialist movement, with Winchevsky ‘using wry humour and satire to encompass the tragedy of the Jewish situation.’<sup>56</sup> In 1885 the socialists established the Berner Street Club as a hub for the movement, for union and political meetings and activities, language classes, lectures and entertainment, and a base for the *Arbayter fraynd*. The Berner Street club initially served both socialists and anarchists, but was later taken over by the anarchists. A ‘Berner-Streeter’ was known as a secularist anti-religious worker and the *Arbayter fraynd* regularly criticised Montagu and Chief Rabbi Herman Adler in its pages.<sup>57</sup>

The socialist trade union leaders were unlike their counterparts in the British trade union movement. The *Arbayter fraynd* editor, Philip Krantz, was influenced by Ferdinand Lasalle’s ‘iron law of wages’. Lasalle considered it impossible for the workers’ standard of living to improve because any rise in wages would bring a rise in prices, so that winning a small increase would not last and workers would revert to being on the same level as before.<sup>58</sup> Isaac Stone, a regular contributor to the *Arbayter fraynd* wrote: ‘Trade unions alone cannot end the wretched life of the worker...they lead workers off the right road with their belief in self help...we socialists say the role of the union should not be only to make strikes but to completely rebuild society.’<sup>59</sup> These ideological perspectives did not attract the workers whose priority was immediate amelioration of their condition. Many workers felt that the socialist activists were more interested in dogma than helping them feed their families, a stance that led Jewish socialists to temper their revolutionary ideas to a level that the workers could relate to.

Although revolutionary socialists were ambivalent about trade unionism, by 1889 they began to regard trade unions as institutions that may propel workers towards ‘an understanding of the exploitative nature of capitalist society, and of the benefit for workers of unity and organisation.’<sup>60</sup> They tried to persuade higher skilled workers not to employ subordinates and leave that to the masters. However, skilled workers did not

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<sup>56</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 139; Buhle and Georgakas, *Immigrant Left*, 83.

<sup>57</sup> Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 112.

<sup>58</sup> Rocker and Ward, *London Years*, 58.

<sup>59</sup> *AF*, 15 July 1885. Quoted in Kershen, *Uniting the Tailors*, 130.

<sup>60</sup> Report of discussion at International Workingmen’s club 1888. Quoted in the *AF*, 6 September 1889. In Feldman, *Englishmen*, 218.

trust that union organisation would improve their working conditions and often preferred to get extra money immediately.<sup>61</sup>

Inspired by a general spate of strikes by English unions, notably the 1888 matchgirls' strike and 1889 dockers' strike which had both ended in success, on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 1889 Jewish tailors, led by trade union activist Lewis Lyons and socialist and strike leader William Wess, called a general strike in the trade.<sup>62</sup> Their main demand was for a 12 hour working day, breaks of an hour for lunch and half an hour for tea and paid, restricted overtime. 'The strike brought together trade unionists and revolutionaries, immigrants and English workers, strikers and shopkeepers.'<sup>63</sup> In three weeks there were six-thousand strikers. The English and Yiddish press gave daily accounts but the *Jewish Chronicle* gave it little coverage, playing down the roles of Lyons and Wess and building up those of the community leaders.<sup>64</sup> The Master Tailors' Protective and Improvement Association made a tentative agreement to be settled the next day. Workers started returning to work, but at the last moment the masters refused to sign, leaving the strikers running to print a handbill and put up posters saying that the masters had broken their word and the strike was still on.<sup>65</sup> The Dock strike fund gave £100 to the strikers, and there were smaller contributions from English trade unions. Finally, in part as a response to the activist atheism of the socialists, and in part seeing unionisation as an important part of anglicisation, Nathan Meyer Rothschild got involved and Samuel Montagu put up the £100 necessary for the employers to resume talks. Although it still dragged on, on October 3<sup>rd</sup> an agreement was signed and demands were met. However, with the constant influx of new immigrants, it proved impossible to sustain, and ended with the collapse of the union.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Rocker and Ward, *London Years*, 90.

<sup>62</sup> Wess was a Lithuanian Jew. He came to London in 1881 to escape military service, and 'provided continuity' in the socialist movement until Rudolph Rocker became involved in the mid 1890s. Fishman, *Radicals*, 172. Details of the 1889 strike from *Ibid.*, 169–90; Kershen, *Uniting the Tailors*, 135–9; Feldman, *Englishmen*, 216–21.

<sup>63</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen*, 216.

<sup>64</sup> Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, 80. Cesarani argues that the *JC* held an ambivalent position on the strike. On one hand it treated the socialists and anarchists with contempt and horror, and on the other hand it supported Jews to unionise so that they 'fend off allegations in the anti-alien press that there were thousands of immigrant anarchists or criminals in the East End.'

<sup>65</sup> Set up by 300 masters tailors two weeks after the start of the strike. Fishman, *Radicals*, 172. A poster in English headlined 'The Strike Still Continues' is in the Jewish Museum, London.

<sup>66</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen*, 227.

In the 1890 shoe and boot strike Jews and Gentiles worked in close co-operation. 10,000 workers came out on strike, demanding an end to outwork.<sup>67</sup> David Schloss, civil servant and member of the Jewish Board of Guardians, described how Jewish sub-contractors appealed to Jewish manufacturers arguing that the maintenance of the sweating system was a *khilel hashem* – a disgrace to the name of God, and passed the responsibility to them to change it.<sup>68</sup> There was an unsatisfactory victory that again was impossible to maintain. In 1912, however, there was a successful mass strike of tailors and tailoresses in the East and West End. The men's strike was over in three weeks, and did not achieve much. The women's strike, however, though lengthy, ended with secured trade union workshops, a twelve-hour day, ten per cent increase in wages and the abolition of having both piece and time rates in the same workplace.<sup>69</sup>

### **Religion and Political Ideologies**

The immigrants came from Eastern Europe with a range of attitudes to religion. Some were devoutly orthodox, some had different degrees of observance. Others were *maskilim*, followers of the enlightenment, revolutionaries and atheists. Tensions and conflict had existed between these groups in Eastern Europe, and immigration to England added new dimensions. Firstly, the devout orthodox came into conflict with the Anglo-Jews' religion and were shocked at the laxity of their observance and the anglicised formality of their services. Secondly, there was anxiety about increasing secularisation particularly amongst the young single immigrants. Thirdly, although some orthodox workers were members of trade unions, they were terrified that the socialist and anarchist atheists would draw people away from Judaism into apostasy.<sup>70</sup>

Most observant immigrant men in the East End prayed in *khevres*. These were small community organisations that not only had prayers three times a day, but also included study, classes, meetings and *khadorim* for teaching boys bible and Talmud in Yiddish before and after school. Potter describes *khevres* as 'self-creating, self-supporting and

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 224; Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 122.

<sup>68</sup> David Schloss, 'The Jew as a Workman', in *The Nineteenth Century*, XXIX (1891), 99–108. From Englander, *Documentary History*, 145.

<sup>69</sup> Pollins, *Economic History*, 162–3.

<sup>70</sup> The orthodox came from different religious sects and tensions existed between them from ideological differences leading to varied religious practice, although they often united to fight against apostates. Ideologies also differed depending on the Eastern Europe origin of the immigrants. Galicia was a part of the Habsburg Empire, and had enlightenment ideas coming in from Germany. After the 1905 abortive revolution there was an influx of radical revolutionaries from Russia.

self-governing communities; small enough to generate public opinion and the practical supervision of private morals, and large enough to stimulate charity, worship and study by communion and example.’<sup>71</sup> During the 1880s they proliferated. Some were *landsmanshaftn*, named after towns the immigrants had come from; Grodno, Kovno, Warsaw, Konin, some were Friendly Societies or trade unions and some were *shtiblekh* (*hasidic* prayer rooms). The *khevres* used whatever makeshift accommodation they could find, leading to complaints of their cramped and dirty conditions, and the *khadorim* as insanitary with untrained teachers.<sup>72</sup> The exception was the Brick Lane *Talmetoire*, set up in 1894, connected to the *Makhzike hadas* synagogue, teaching a thousand children, sixty to a class in a four-storey building.<sup>73</sup>

*Khevres* were very different from the formal synagogues of Anglo-Jewry. Immigrants found the synagogues deeply strange in their use of English, the solemn tone, begowned clerics, choral music and stately architecture. The synagogues also charged exorbitant fees that made them inaccessible to the immigrants. The immigrants saw the Anglo-Jewish concentration on anglicisation as detrimental to their Jewish religious practice, the Chief Rabbi being known in the East End as ‘the West End *goy*’. The style of prayer in the *khevres*, on the other hand, was informal, noisy and individual. They charged low fees, and though many *khevres* could not afford rabbis, others employed immigrant rabbis from Eastern Europe.<sup>74</sup>

There were several attempts by Anglo-Jewry to bring the *khevres* into the fold. One United Synagogue scheme wanted to build an all encompassing East End centre for the immigrants with a 1200-seat synagogue, meeting hall, *beys midrash*, *beys din*, provident society and savings bank. It came to nothing amid opposition from some Anglo-Jews as well as being at odds with immigrants’ desires.<sup>75</sup> Another intervention was made by Samuel Montagu MP, in 1888, in establishing The Federation of Synagogues with Nathan Mayer Rothschild as president. The aim was to unite larger *khevres* and small synagogues, improve sanitation and the state of the buildings by giving loans,

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<sup>71</sup> Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London*, vol. iii, 1st (London, 1902), 172.

<sup>72</sup> Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 142–5, 158.

<sup>73</sup> *JC*, 24 February 1905. Quoted in Nancy Green and P. Altman, *Jewish Workers in the Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley: California University, 1998), 196.

<sup>74</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 146; David Englander, ‘Booth’s Jews: The Presentation of Jews and Judaism in “Life and Labour of the London Poor”’, *Victorian Studies* 32, no. 4 (1989): 34; Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 144.

<sup>75</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 178.



amalgamate *khadorim* and train teachers in English. They also had an anglicisation brief and conducted all business in English. The Federation would be able to fight for immigrant needs as a voice on the Jewish Board of Guardians and Board of Deputies. By 1903 there were 39 *khevres* and synagogues in the Federation. Antagonism between the *khevres* and the United Synagogue around community control created bitter conflicts.<sup>76</sup>

The conflict around marriage and divorce concerned the mismatch between English civil law and religious Jewish law. In Russia a *ketube* (religious marriage contract), was the only official document required for a Jewish marriage. In English law, however, civil marriage documentation was also required. Civil marriages for Jews were regulated by the attendance of the secretary of the synagogue acting as registrar on behalf of the state. The appointment of the marriage secretary was on the recommendation of the President of the Board of Deputies and they only registered synagogues they deemed appropriate. This excluded the small *khevres* and prioritised the large Anglo-Jewish synagogues. In addition, marriage licenses required a fee which presented difficulties for many immigrants. Some immigrants, therefore, chose irregular marriages officiated by rabbis from Eastern Europe without fulfilling the civil requirements. The lack of civil marriage documentation made it easier for men to desert their wives and children. If the marriage had been contracted in Russia and the *ketube* had been lost, it was difficult to prove the validity of even the religious marriage and to track down the deserting husband.<sup>77</sup> A similar problem occurred with divorce. A couple unable to afford a civil divorce might go to an East End rabbi who would organise a *get* (divorce document presented by a husband to a wife). However, although religiously divorced, if the couple married other people they would be regarded as bigamists under English law.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, if an orthodox wife was abandoned by her husband without being given a *get*, she could not re-marry. Without a breadwinner the wife and children would be forced onto charity or into prostitution. The East European press was full of ‘pathetic appeals from *agunes* [chained women] and their families and from local rabbis pleading for the news of whereabouts of husbands.’<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> For the early days of the Federation, see Alderman, *Federation of Synagogues*, 1–41; Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 156–65.

<sup>77</sup> David Englander, ‘Stille Huppah (Quiet Marriage) Among Jewish Immigrants in Britain’, *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 34, no. 2 (1992): 90–3.

<sup>78</sup> For the position of *agunot* in relation to English law, see Feldman, *Englishmen*, 296–7.

<sup>79</sup> Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 168–71.

There was an additional problem of a *shtile khupe*. In Eastern Europe, families who could not afford a wedding might celebrate the marriage in their home without a minister, simply with two witnesses, a ring and a consecration blessing. Although these *shtile khupes* were religiously correct, there was no documentation, and therefore no legal rights for deserted wives.<sup>80</sup> The *shtile khupe* enabled traffickers in the white slave trade to seduce young women into compromising situations, court and marry them, and then force them into prostitution either in Eastern Europe, London or further afield.<sup>81</sup>

Anglo-Jewry also came into conflict with immigrants around standards of kosher food. This conflict was drawn out and complicated and became extremely bitter. The Anglo-Jewish community held a monopoly on *shechita* (ritual slaughter of animals) with the London Shechita Board charging an inflated price for kosher meat. They allowed non-kosher butchers to sell kosher meat and allowed non-porged meat as kosher. Orthodox immigrants did not consider the meat kosher enough. The *Makhzike hadas* were at the forefront of pushing for the provision of kosher meat that would satisfy orthodox requirements. They set up their own Shechita Board, calling the United Synagogue's meat *treyf* (unclean/non-kosher). Chief Rabbi Herman Adler responded similarly, which set off a tit-for-tat series of actions with Adler requesting letters of support from East European rabbis and the *Makhzike hadas* following suit. The *Makhzike hadas* cut 1/2d off a pound of meat and the London Shechita Board had to follow. The resulting feud lasted years, spread to the provinces. It ended in the civil courts.<sup>82</sup>

As much as the immigrant orthodox were dismayed at the Anglo-Jewish community's less strict religiosity, they also had to deal with secularisation within the immigrant community. Secularisation was on the increase and Sabbath observation was on the decrease. The Jewish Board of Guardians had a policy of dispersing Jewish workers into 'non-Jewish' trades as a way of lessening the crowded job market. However, this led 'almost directly to Sabbath-breaking.' Additionally, exhausted workers from Jewish

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<sup>80</sup> Englander, 'Stille Huppah', 91. In *Children of the Ghetto* a prank is played by Samuel Levine fooling around and pretending to marry Hannah, instead of his betrothed. The joke is religiously a marriage, and the couple have to go through a religious divorce before she can marry again. The consequences are severe for Hannah because she is unable to marry the man she loves, who is a Cohen, and cannot marry a divorced woman. Zangwill and Rochelson, *Children of the Ghetto*, 117–20.

<sup>81</sup> Bristow, *Prostitution, Prejudice*, 103–7.

<sup>82</sup> Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 209–14; Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 146–151; Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 178–9.

workshops wanted to sleep on the Sabbath morning rather than getting up early to pray, and in general there was growing religious indifference.<sup>83</sup>

But it was the socialists' and anarchists' behaviour that was seen as most provocative. The anarchists advocated free love, and the socialists 'ridiculed "foolish girls" who troubled with nonsensical religious forms to the disregard of the essentials of 'honour, faithfulness, and full-hearted love.'<sup>84</sup> The anarchists and social democrats saw religion as an 'obstacle to enlightenment and political self-consciousness', and often the *Arbayter fraynd* contained articles attacking religion, calling the Chief Rabbi, someone who 'believes in the sweating system more than God.'<sup>85</sup> Samuel Montagu tried to sabotage the socialists by putting the *Arbayter fraynd* out of circulation on a number of occasions. He also employed charismatic preachers Dr Mayer Lerner and Chaim Zundel Maccoby, the *magid* of Kamenitzk to preach against socialism and atheism in East End pulpits. The socialists responded by taunting with Yom Kippur Balls, noisy gatherings outside synagogues on Friday nights and smoking on synagogue grounds.<sup>86</sup>

This conflict came to a head in the Synagogue parade of 1889 just before the tailors' strike. Hundreds of working class Jews marched to the Great Synagogue in the East End where Adler was going to deliver a sermon to the unemployed and victims of sweating. Yet he refused to speak and refused the marchers entry to the synagogue.<sup>87</sup>

During the second half of the 1890s, amid lots of in-fighting, the anarchists began to take over from the socialists. Rudolf Rocker, a German non-Jewish anarchist became their charismatic leader and the *Arbayter fraynd* turned anarchist. The British Jewish anarchists, organising in Yiddish and campaigning from their new Jubilee Street headquarters, took over Jewish trade union positions and were actively campaigning against the sweating system. Rocker argued that the struggle for working people to join

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<sup>83</sup> Russell and Lewis, *The Jew in London*, 119–20; Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 192–3.

<sup>84</sup> *AF*, 23 November 1889. Quoted in Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 117.

<sup>85</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen*, 332–3. Including translation from *AF*, 2–9 March 1888.

<sup>86</sup> Samuel Montagu saw the *AF* as the gravest threat to Judaism in its 'non-stop verbal assault on religion and its institutions'. Fishman, *Radicals*, 155–7. Rocker describes attempts at sabotaging the *AF* by Anglo-Jewish leaders. On one occasion, the back cover text, 'Workers do your duty, spread the *Arbayter fraynd!*', was changed to 'destroy'. On another occasion a printer was paid off and escaped to America. Another printer was bribed, stopping the *AF* without warning from May 1887 for three months. Rocker and Ward, *London Years*, 61.

<sup>87</sup> Green and Altman, *Jewish Workers*, 137–9.

the movement had to be not only about economic conditions but backed by an ethical desire for justice.<sup>88</sup>

However, after the abortive 1905 revolution a stream of Russian anarchists and revolutionaries arrived in London, and these anarchists came from a different mould. These Russian anarchists were used to working underground, being involved in violence and saw the state police as their enemy. They brought those experiences to London. They wanted to raise money for revolutionary causes back home, and staged ‘expropriations’, armed bank raids, to steal money for the cause. Rocker tried to hold back both violent anarchists and Russian spies that came to London attempting all sorts of daredevil feats that would cost civilian life, but they were not successful. The Tottenham Outrage, a bungled robbery led by Latvian Social Revolutionaries in 1909, left two people dead and 27 injured. The Houndsditch Murders and subsequent Siege of Sidney Street 2010-11 left three revolutionaries and three policemen dead. The siege ended with a gunfight in the East End and was headline news long after. The remainder of the gang were arrested and taken to court but were released on insufficient evidence. These actions spread alarm in the East End and across the country. Not discriminating between violent revolutionaries and non-violent anarchists, the general population linked violence to anarchists and anarchist to Jews, leading to an upsurge in anti-alien feeling. By the beginning of the First World War the anarchists were no longer a player in East End politics.<sup>89</sup>

The socialists also had to fight the new ideology of Zionism. Since 1890 there had been an English branch of Chovevei Tzion (Lovers of Zion), supported by many in the Anglo-Jewish elite. Chovevei Zion supported the gradual establishment of agricultural colonies in Palestine ‘as a historical-religious bond, not a political aspiration for statehood.’ In 1895, Theodore Herzl came to London to discuss and gain support for his idea of a Jewish homeland. Israel Zangwill introduced him to leaders of the Anglo-Jewish community, and Herzl spoke to a meeting of the Maccabeans getting a ‘muted’ and ‘reserved’ response.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Rocker and Ward, *London Years*, 84.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 106–111; Rumbelow, *Houndsditch Murders*, 15–29, 69–85, 123–139. For the way anarchism and attendant anti-alienism was portrayed in fiction and verse, see Glover, *Literature, Immigration*, 171–186.

<sup>90</sup> Lipman, *Britain since 1858*, 120; Feldman, *Englishmen*, 343; Stuart Cohen A., *English Zionists and British Jews: The Communal Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1895-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 25, 29.

Zionist politics were seen as antithetical to being an Anglo-Jew. The Anglo-Jewish elite saw their Judaism as a religion practised by English people. They were embarrassed and worried about the implications of supporting a nation of Jews. Asher Myers, editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* ‘slammed’ Herzl in his editorials, although there were many letters by Zionists in response, and it did cover the 1897 First Zionist Congress in Basel.<sup>91</sup>

The only Anglo-Jewish institution to give any support to Herzl was the Chovevei Tzion, however Herzl dismissed their slow methodical strategy as ‘puny’. After the first Zionist congress in 1897, despite attempts to bring it into Herzl’s political Zionist fold, Chovevei Tzion disbanded, with most of the Anglo-Jewish elite leadership becoming anti-Zionists.<sup>92</sup>

Theodor Herzl attracted huge audiences of immigrants in the East End. He spoke to a crowded hall in Whitechapel in 1896, and in 1898 a packed audience at the Great Assembly hall in Mile End heard him declare: ‘the East End is ours’. This claim was premature, however, because interest from the meeting only developed into small Zionist groups who gave small donations, but produced little action. And even within these groups, there was little unity as Zionists came from different political persuasions and levels of orthodoxy.<sup>93</sup>

The socialists opposed the Zionists on many ideological fronts. From the start, they saw Zionism as Jewish nationalism and argued that it was bourgeois, taking race rather than class as its basis. They despised the Zionist view of anti-Semitism, which blamed Eastern European Jews for their own persecution, using this as a plank to argue that there would be no safety outside of a Jewish state.<sup>94</sup> In 1886 the *Arbayter fraynd* attacked the Anglo-Jewish Chovevei Tzion arguing that the movement was made up of bourgeois, Western Europeans who had no fellow feeling for poor Eastern European brethren. Even if they were able to establish a Jewish homeland it would maintain the

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<sup>91</sup> Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, 87.

<sup>92</sup> Cohen, *English Zionists*, 36; Lipman, *Britain since 1858*, 122.

<sup>93</sup> Geoffrey Alderman, ‘The Political Impact of Zionism in the East End Before 1940: Some Thoughts Prompted by the Experience of Whitechapel’, in *The Jewish East End 1840-1939*, ed. Aubrey Newman (London: The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1981), 225; Feldman, *Englishmen*, 347.

<sup>94</sup> For an analysis of the socialist opposition to Zionism, see Frankel, *Prophecy*, 157–80.

class system and the appalling conditions of the Pale, and that Chovevei Tzion would establish a society totally dependent on charity.<sup>95</sup>

The socialists continued to attack on two fronts, both the Anglo-Jewish Zionists and the immigrant Zionists. In 1899 *The Arbayer fraynd* mocked those who attended Herzl's meetings as 'good-for-nothing layabouts and ignoramuses, on the one hand and snobbish Jews who wished to rid themselves of the masses, on the other.' It criticised political Zionism insisting that it would 'distract the Jewish proletariat from the struggle for its liberation.' The socialists also condemned the socialist Poalei Zion and 'Zionism from a Socialist Standpoint'. This left Poalei Zion in England isolated from both the Zionist movement and the socialists.<sup>96</sup>

### **Anti-Alienism and Restriction**

From the mid 1880s there were demands for legislation to restrict immigration. It was a response to the view that massive unemployment was due to immigrants bringing unskilled labour into the country. The situation was aggravated by the depressions of 1885–7 and 1892. The trades hardest hit by depression were typified by seasonal or irregular unemployment, so fears of job security were greatest in those trades where 'immigrants were conspicuously employed', and were a 'plausible group of rank outsiders.'<sup>97</sup>

Feldman argues that the demands for immigration restriction were 'part of an attempt to redefine the role of the state and the idea of the nation.'<sup>98</sup> This argument suggests a link between English conservative attempts at anglicisation and calls for restriction. The immigrant community fails the conservative and anti-Semites' test of Englishness. Despite ongoing acculturation programmes from within the Jewish community, the immigrants remained foreign and poor, and their internal anglicisation attempts insufficient.

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<sup>95</sup> *AF*, July, August and September 1886. Quoted in Cohen, *English Zionists*, 59.

<sup>96</sup> *AF*, 7, 14 July 1899. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 59–60.

<sup>97</sup> Feldman, 'Importance', 58; Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, 21–2.

<sup>98</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen*, 269.

The Liberal Party opposed legislation to restrict immigration on the grounds of free trade in goods and people, but East End Conservative candidates demanded restriction.<sup>99</sup> In 1888 a House of Lords committee examined sweating, concluding that wage problems were in trades not affected by the immigrants. In 1889 a House of Commons committee on immigration found immigrants dirty but good citizens. However, this had no effect on public opinion's spiralling momentum. In 1891 Arnold White set up the Association for preventing the immigration of destitute aliens. In 1892-95, the TUC passed resolutions against free immigration arguing that alien Jews undercut British labour.<sup>100</sup> Local anti-alien groups argued that Jews sent women to work, were averse to heavy labour, did not join trade unions, 'desecrated the Christian Sabbath, stored rags in their yards, made noise from homework' and were an affront to respectability.<sup>101</sup>

In 1901 William Evans-Gordon, MP for Stepney set up the British Brothers' League, an anti-alien pressure group demanding restrictive legislation. In *The Alien Immigrant* published in 1903, Evans-Gordon argued that Jews were forcing out English inhabitants in two ways. Firstly, they were buying up properties, bypassing paying legal fees, and becoming landlords who demanded rents and key money that no English worker could afford. Secondly that aliens were able to compete successfully with native workers because they are prepared to survive on a 'disastrously low standard of living.'<sup>102</sup> Not only Tories joined, there was cross-party support including Jewish MPs. Membership rose to 12,000 people but could raise 45,000 signatures on petitions. Bernard Gainer argues that the British Brothers' League acted as a 'safety valve', for frustrated emotions, and had they not taken that role, there could have been more violent clashes, such as those in South Wales in 1911.<sup>103</sup>

A small but influential group of the Anglo-Jewish elite supported the proposed legislation as long as it did not 'inviolate the right of asylum.' Supporters included Benjamin Cohen, President of the Jewish Board of Guardians, and Hermann Adler did

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<sup>99</sup> The Radical Right counterpublic, made up of different groups on the right, argued for restriction to 'steer British society onto a fresh course.' Glover, *Literature, Immigration*, 103. For arguments of Right Wing groups, *Ibid.*, 103-118.

<sup>100</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 159; Finestein, *Victorian England*, 205-6.

<sup>101</sup> *Royal Commission on Alien Immigration* (q.1,641, q.1,724) in Feldman, 'Importance', 72-3.

<sup>102</sup> William Eden Evans-Gordon, *The Alien Immigrant* (Memphis, Tennessee: General Books LLC, 2010), 24-9.

<sup>103</sup> Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 135; Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 160; Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, 63.

not condemn it.<sup>104</sup> Most communal leaders, however, did not support the legislation. They wanted to reduce immigration by actions within the community, such as publicising anti-Semitism in Russia, arguing that if the government put pressure on Russia to relieve the situation for the Jews it would slow down emigration.<sup>105</sup>

By the time the Aliens Act passed in 1905 it had undergone a number of revisions making it less exclusionary. In 1906 the Liberal Party came back to power. They did not repeal the Act, but were not strict about its enforcement.<sup>106</sup> There were attempts to tighten the Act including registering aliens and demanding that alien offenders should be expelled. The Board of Deputies' response to these amendments was cautious. This led to East End activists setting up the Aliens Defence Committee (ADC) in 1911, to be joined by 35 immigrant organisations. The ADC's aim was to protect, advise and educate. It ensured the Yiddish press reported how immigrants could access necessary information. The ADC attempted to take on the Board's role by attacking Churchill's bill on specific points. The bill did not pass, and by the summer of 1911 the ADC was fading and the alien issue was coming off the agenda. However, the ADC had developed new political structures outside of the Anglo-Jewish institutions.<sup>107</sup>

## Conclusion

The 1914 Jewish landscape on the eve of war was a very different place to the relatively calm Anglo-Jewish world of 1870. The Anglo-Jewish elite, were no longer the most visible aspect of Anglo-Jewry. There was anxiety that the image of a Jew had become a poor, badly educated immigrant identified with crime, violence, and anarchism. The growing anti-Jewish feeling across Europe led Anglo-Jewry to imagine that the emancipation contract was under threat.

The East End was filled with tension, conflicts for daily survival and fierce debates on ideology. Differences between and within groups were huge, allegiances were not simple, and strange and paradoxical alliances were forged. On the one hand immigrants gratefully accepted Anglo-Jewish charitable help: loans from the Jewish Board of

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<sup>104</sup> *The Times* 21 March 1894, 5. Quoted in Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 135.

<sup>105</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 173.

<sup>106</sup> On the relaxation of the rules of the Act, see Glover, *Literature, Immigration*, 164–6.

<sup>107</sup> The Aliens Act demanded immigrants demonstrate they could support themselves 'decently'. This excluded criminals, insane, and anyone needing state support. Immigrants could appeal to the immigration board. The Act provided asylum for those escaping persecution on account of religious belief. Feldman, *Englishmen*, 272, 290, 361–6.



Guardians, relief from the Russo-Jewish Committee and school clothes from the Jews' Free School. On the other hand the immigrants berated Anglo-Jewry for trying to control them, such as the attempt to establish a massive East End synagogue to house all *khevres*. On the one hand orthodox and socialist Jews united in trade union meetings, sometimes held on *khevre* premises, fighting for better pay and working conditions. Yet on the other hand socialist conversionism was decried from the pulpit in Yiddish by fiery preachers. On the one hand trade union leaders might create an alliance of workers and small masters to fight together against contractors. And on the other hand workers abandoned trade union gains in order to keep the next bit of work during the 'slack' season.<sup>108</sup> Socialists would speak Yiddish in order to work within the community, drawing workers into educational improvement and modernisation, while believing in non-separatist international communities organising around class, not race.

These paradoxes existed side by side. Many Jews sought free medical aid and food from missionaries. The fear of apostasy prompted Jewish charities to copy the missionaries aid and become more philanthropic.<sup>109</sup> Parents were forced to educate their children in Jewish free schools and Board schools that pushed anglicisation, and where Jewish education was low on the agenda, so they responded by sending them to hours of after-school *kheyder* study.

In 1903 the whole community, immigrants, orthodox, anarchists, Zionists and Anglo-Jews were united in their shocked response to the Kishinev pogrom. However, the delayed response of the Anglo-Jewish establishment in condemning the pogrom caused friction with the immigrants, and the inclusion of the Zionists in the Hyde Park protest against the Kishinev pogrom caused anger amongst the socialists. There were arguments between political groups as to where fundraising money should go, and the incident showed how the differences of ideology within the Jewish community were heartfelt, deep and irreconcilable.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Black, *JFS*, 95–7; Feldman, *Englishmen*, 327, 239–43.

<sup>109</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 86.

<sup>110</sup> This argument is developed in Ben Gidley, 'The Ghosts of Kishinev in the East End: Responses to a Pogrom in the Jewish London of 1903', in *The 'Jew' in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture: Between the East End and East Africa* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 131–43.

The conflict between East End immigrants and Anglo-Jews and the conflicts within the immigrant community were both a backdrop to, and a source of inspiration for, writers and performers. The Yiddish-speaking East End, full of political and social debate, developed a cultural life that both reflected and engaged with the political ideas, while providing entertainment and spaces where new identities could be forged and tried out. This cultural milieu was an integral part of immigrant life, sometimes a part of the debate, sometimes a trigger, and sometimes a source of humour. But always engaging, questioning and re-defining.

## Chapter 2: Interactions and Influences on Anglo-Yiddish Popular Culture

There are two significant points of interaction that influenced and inspired the Yiddish-speaking immigrant writers in London, and are important in understanding the context of the Anglo-Yiddish popular poems and songs. First is Yiddish literature. In the early 1880s, there was a very short tradition of Yiddish poetry and theatre into which the poets and songwriters were writing. There were few Yiddish models to draw on, so writers drew inspiration from *maskilik* (Jewish Enlightenment) and Hebrew literature, and often went further afield to Eastern European and world literatures. Yet the Yiddish literary scene was fast developing during this thirty-year period, creating a wider range of poetic styles. In addition, immigration brought new experiences that became themes in popular texts.

The second influence was the interaction between Yiddish and English popular culture. The Yiddish-speaking East End was part of a very vibrant London community. Anglo-Yiddish socialism sat alongside English socialist groups. Socialists and unionists in the 1880s and 1890s were often fighting similar battles, and the interconnected worlds of the socialist writers, although limited, can be seen in William Morris's support of Yiddish socialism. The Yiddish and English socialist poets were comrades, writing poetry for parallel demonstrations and union activism. Around the turn of the twentieth century music-hall songwriters were also influenced by their English counterparts. The Yiddish halls operated amid the long established English scene and were bound by the same rules and regulations. Songs used similar themes or provided new words to English melodies. In general the Yiddish poetry and song written in London for an immigrant audience engaged with English politics and cultural mores. At times the interaction was exacerbated by the tension between the old world and the new world and the push for anglicisation and modernity.

These different genres of popular culture did not sit together happily, and there was a constant tension around quality in art, aesthetics and what was termed *shund* (trash) by its critics. The Anglo-Yiddish popular texts were the focus of a wider debate about high and low-brow culture concerning the nature of popular satire and performance, as entertainment or edification.

This chapter offers a new contribution to Anglo-Jewish historiography. It offers a history of Anglo-Yiddish popular song and poetry and an exploration and overview of the English and Yiddish contexts of these popular cultural forms. It is organised chronologically rather than thematically, as the debates shift through the decades. Benjamin Harshav argues that changes in Yiddish cultural output can be seen to coincide with changes in generations of around sixteen years, starting with the ‘shock’ of 1881. Writers in different political climates often wrote in response to those political events.<sup>1</sup> The thirty-year span covered by this thesis coincides with political events that changed the nature of the Yiddish audience in England, and thus had an effect on the material being published and performed. In the waves of immigration in the 1880s the immigrants were mainly poverty-stricken and uneducated workers trying to improve their economic status. The end of the century coincides with the establishment of the Jewish Labour *Bund* in Russia, with its concentration on the status of the Yiddish language and creating Yiddish cultural activities, so many immigrants from this period would have been more familiar with the growing Yiddish literature. The period after 1905 brought immigrants who were political refugees from the abortive 1905 Russian revolution. They demanded a more serious political engagement with Yiddish culture which embraced the wider world.

## **Part 1: 1884-1894**

### ***Socialist poetry***

In the 1880s Yiddish poetry had barely begun as a genre. The *haskole* (Jewish enlightenment) writers had considered Yiddish a *zhargon* (jargon) or a domestic spoken language rather than a literary language, and therefore unsuitable for writing poetry. Although many *haskole* poets had dabbled in Yiddish, they had mainly written in Hebrew, German or Russian. The poet Isaac Meir Dik was a *maskil* who wrote solely in Yiddish, however he was held ‘in very low regard by his fellow *maskilim*, as a scribbler and dilettante.’<sup>2</sup> This meant that the early socialist poets, such as Winchevsky, had few models of Yiddish poetry, and for a poetic aesthetic they were more likely to have looked towards Hebrew and biblical poetry or European poetry in German, Russian or

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 63. For background *hasidic* and *haskole* cultures of Eastern Europe, see David Biale, *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 802–46; Anthony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: 1881-1914*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 238–62.

<sup>2</sup> David Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 6.

English for their inspiration.<sup>3</sup> Harshav argues that the Yiddish socialist poetry written in London was ‘not given to lyrical imagination and subtleties of language but promoted political rhetoric in the precise meters of Russian verse.’<sup>4</sup>

The socialist poets were also influenced by Yiddish song. Yiddish folk song, generations old, had made up the childhood landscape of tune and rhyme imbibed from lullabies, childhood games and community singing. As adults, the major influences were three Yiddish popular song or verse-writers and singers. Berl Broder wrote song-dialogues in rhyming verse and performed them in taverns in Bessarabia in the mid nineteenth century with a troupe of ‘Broder singers’. Elyokum Zunser was a prolific Lithuanian *batkhn* (wedding jester), and the first to publish his *batkhones* of rhyming couplets which were widely read.<sup>5</sup> Abraham Goldfaden established the first Yiddish theatre in 1876 in Romania and wrote dozens of plays, poems and songs which were performed on the new Yiddish stage.<sup>6</sup> Socialists drawing inspiration from popular song were disdained by critics who rejected the rhyming couplets that Winchevsky and the ‘sweatshop’ poets penned. Decades later, when Yiddish poetry had developed substantially, very little of the poetry of the socialist writers was included in the ‘canon’ of Yiddish poetry, being seen as too concerned with the political message it was portraying and too unconcerned with aesthetics.<sup>7</sup> Yet the popularity of socialist poetry attested to its place in popular Yiddish culture.<sup>8</sup>

The Yiddish press was the main institution that acted as a vehicle for Yiddish culture in a written form.<sup>9</sup> The modern Yiddish press dated back to the 1860s in Odessa, where Alexander Tsederboym’s *Kol mevaser* (A voice of Tidings) was published as a Yiddish supplement to the Hebrew newspaper *HaMelitz* (The Advocate). One of Tsederboym’s

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<sup>3</sup> Winchevsky’s early Hebrew poetry is influenced by the writings of the biblical prophets who themselves got their ideas from class war at the time. His Yiddish poetry was derived from his own Hebrew work. Bik, *Troymer, kemfer*, 12–16.

<sup>4</sup> Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution*, 66.

<sup>5</sup> Yiddish critic Bialostotski called Zunser’s verse ‘fine, intelligent, moral-enlightenment *batkhones* about good and bad’. B. Y. Bialostotski. “*In di gasn – tsu di masn*”. *Veker*, 24 June 1922. See also Quint, ‘Salon and Tavern’, 44–54; Liptzin, *A History of Yiddish Literature*, 48.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of poetry during this period, see Liptzin, *A History of Yiddish Literature*, 73–97.

<sup>7</sup> For this criticism of Winchevsky’s verse, see Litvak, ‘Vintshevski, der onheyber’, 4–11.

<sup>8</sup> The YIVO archive on Winchevsky alone includes hundreds of articles and manuscripts including posters for events where he was speaking.

<sup>9</sup> Ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman assesses how culture is maintained for Europeans without nations, and the emergence of national songs produced in newspapers, song pamphlets and broadsides. He argues the importance of keeping culture alive through retaining the vernacular, formalising it in print, and singing it. Philip. V. Bohlman, *The Music of European Nationalism: Cultural Identity and Modern History* (Santa Barbara: Abc-Clio Incorporated, 2004), 224.

aims was the education of the Yiddish-speaking public, and to this end he published modern Yiddish literature. He serialised the first works of Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh (Mendele) in *Kol mevaser* from 1864 and continued to publish many other writers including the debut of Sholem Aleichem in the *Yidishes folksblat* (Jewish People's Paper) in St. Petersburg in 1885.<sup>10</sup>

Leonard Prager argued that also in Britain the Yiddish press was 'perhaps the single most important cultural institution from the perspective of language maintenance.' The Yiddish press functioned as a mediator in developing the immigrants' literacy at the same time as being a vital information source.<sup>11</sup> For example, in addition to news and features, the *Poylishe yidl* published Yiddish fiction, translations of classics into Yiddish and new Yiddish socialist poetry. Throughout Winchevsky's time in London the socialist press became the primary vehicle for socialist poetry penned in England.<sup>12</sup> The *Poylishe yidl* was followed by the *Arbayter fraynd*, and when that paper turned anarchist in 1890, the *Fraye velt* and the *Vekker* took over as socialist newspapers that included Winchevsky's literary output. In 1894 Winchevsky left for America, leaving the *Arbayter fraynd* under anarchist editorship with less frequent publication of works by local socialist poets.

The lack of a significant tradition of Yiddish poetry became an object of debate in London when the Yiddish and English socialist worlds encountered each other. The Eastern European Jewish socialists were generally internationalists, and when they came to London, as well as campaigning amongst the Yiddish-speaking workers, they joined the English socialist movements, such as the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Socialist League (SL).<sup>13</sup> These movements were, in the mid-1880s, also developing a body of socialist literature.

The English socialists, unlike their Yiddish counterparts, wrote within a tradition of political songs: industrial songs and broadside ballads. Eighteenth century industrial

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<sup>10</sup> Nathan Cohen, 'The Yiddish Press and Yiddish Literature: A Fertile But Complex Relationship', *Modern Judaism* 28, no. 2 (May 2008): 149–51.

<sup>11</sup> Prager, *Yiddish Culture*, 38, 33–4.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Sanders suggests that English literature was an influence in Winchevsky's early socialist writing, arguing that he 'adapted British Victorian conventions' and an 'atmosphere from Dickens'. Ronald Sanders, *The Downtown Jews: Portraits of an Immigrant Generation* (New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 143.

<sup>13</sup> Winchevsky's SDF membership card (1893) and delegate card for the International Workers' Socialist Congress in Zurich (1893) are in YIVO archives (Kalman Marmor Collection).

songs were written by working people about their experience of work, and sung by workers at workplaces, pubs and clubs. They were down-to-earth, rarely literary and used known folk and popular tunes.<sup>14</sup> The songs did not try to reflect an accurate view of the workplace, but used simple narratives with a universal messages ‘for democracy, resilience and progress [and] against snobbery and conservatism.’<sup>15</sup> In contrast, broadside ballads, known as the ‘journalism of the poor’ were topical and political songs, with often irreverent reports of daily events. These were published as songsheets and sold on the streets.<sup>16</sup> The ballads developed a reputation for being ‘scurrilous, satirical [and] sensational.’<sup>17</sup> The new music-halls of the 1850s started producing similar songs, creating a ‘fluid boundary’ between the two genres. However, as the music halls grew in popularity and produced their own songbooks more cheaply than the broadside ballads, the broadsides went into decline.<sup>18</sup>

The loss of the political broadsides left a space, to be filled in the 1880s by political poetry from specific ideologies, and published in the radical press and as workers’ songbooks. The socialists, however, were not producing poems and songs for entertainment. They were concerned with the power of verse as education, propaganda and activism. Poetry and song could teach about socialism, and make high culture more accessible. Socialist songs could be sung on the streets to raise funds for striking families or show loyalty to your own philosophy and hostility to an opposing group.<sup>19</sup>

Socialist views on the edifying possibilities in music were partly inspired by the conservative-led mid-Victorian idea of ‘rational recreation’. Rational recreation promoted the appropriate use of leisure time, believing that this would lead to ‘desirable social change’.<sup>20</sup> The conservative middle class strove to limit drinking, ‘feasting and brawling’ by providing alternatives that were mentally stimulating rather than physically debilitating.<sup>21</sup> In the 1890s, conservative reformers imparted their message by taking music to the workers. With a piano on a cart they arranged free concerts on the

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<sup>14</sup> Watson, *Democratic Culture*, 9; Middleton, ‘Popular Music of the Lower Classes’, 73.

<sup>15</sup> Watson, *Democratic Culture*, 135.

<sup>16</sup> Senelick, ‘Politics as Entertainment’, 153.

<sup>17</sup> Middleton, ‘Popular Music of the Lower Classes’, 70–1.

<sup>18</sup> Watson, *Democratic Culture*, 19; Senelick, ‘Politics as Entertainment’, 152.

<sup>19</sup> C. Alexander McKinley, *Illegitimate Children of the Enlightenment: Anarchists and the French Revolution, 1880-1914* (New York: P. Lang, 2008), 130.

<sup>20</sup> Waters, *British Socialists*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 48–9.

streets, performing carefully chosen classical music and songs. They organised festivals and competitions for working class choirs singing classical repertoire.<sup>22</sup> However, the conservatives' attempt to offer stimulating leisure activities to workers was tempered by their anxiety that too much intellectual stimulation might open workers to radical politics.

Socialists, however, welcomed creative and intellectual recreation opportunities given to workers, allowing them to develop new ideas to create their own political identities. They assumed that the new identity would be the socialist one they were propounding.<sup>23</sup> The socialists used similar strategies to encourage workers to spend their leisure time on education and self-improvement, organising choirs and arranging concerts in workers' clubs.<sup>24</sup> Music was popular at socialist events where meetings often opened and closed with carefully composed and selected songs, poems and readings.<sup>25</sup>

The socialist weekly *Clarion*, established in 1891, described choral singing as 'a lesson in discipline and socialism of the most convincing sort' maintaining that 'the interdependence of each on all... gives an exultant feeling of precision, unity, and power.'<sup>26</sup> The Clarion Vocal Union (CVU), established in 1895, set up choirs across the country to provide entertainment at socialist gatherings and festivals. The CVU considered the formality of a choir as having edifying qualities with its use of Victorian part-harmony and the Tonic Sol-fa method of sight reading.<sup>27</sup>

As well as the classical repertoire, choirs needed new socialist song material, so songbooks were compiled with a repertoire to give a sense of connection and solidarity amongst workers.<sup>28</sup> A substantial repertoire had been developed earlier by Chartists,

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<sup>22</sup> Russell, *Popular Music*, 36, 43–4; Waters, *British Socialists*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Waters, *British Socialists*, 8, 13. The term 'control' had been used for schemes for working class music. After 1880, the terminology was 'to take' music to the working class, and after 1900 the aim was to 'broaden horizons'. Russell, *Popular Music*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> There were a small number of brass bands and orchestras. However choral singing was seen as the most political form of music making. Russell, *Popular Music*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Yeo, 'New Life', 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Clarion* 12 December 1895. Quoted in Russell, *Popular Music*, 53–4.

<sup>27</sup> Tonic Sol-fa was an agent of reform in mid-nineteenth century temperance movement choirs. It aimed to be morally uplifting through greater musical literacy, and a distracting pastime to replace drink and gambling. Charles Edward McGuire, 'Music and Morality: Tonic Sol-Fa, the Temperance Movement, and the Oratorios of Edward Elgar', in *Chorus and Community*, ed. Karen Ahlquist (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 111–19. Socialist and conservative choirs used the same methods of Victorian part-harmony and sol-fa, with the reformers wanting to maintain the status quo and the socialists wanting to overthrow it. Waters, *British Socialists*, 101, 128.

<sup>28</sup> Waters, *British Socialists*, 107, 121.



who used poetry as integral to political action. Their poetry affirmed shared values, contributed to Chartist debate and strategy and articulated the movement's identity.<sup>29</sup> The socialists wanted to produce their equivalent politics in verse, and published collections of new labour hymns, 'chants for socialists', and poems taken from newspapers such as the *Workman's Times* or *Clarion*.<sup>30</sup>

The Yiddish socialists had similar needs to their English equivalents. There were attempts to develop a body of poetic material that included socialist polemic, anthems and ballads about working conditions. Some even mirrored English work songs, such as Winchevsky's free-translation of 'The Song of the Shirt'.<sup>31</sup> Much of the Yiddish material was written for the particular English situation Yiddish immigrant workers found themselves in. The Yiddish socialist community also encouraged choirs, which were advertised in the local Yiddish press, and workers' songbooks were published by London presses.<sup>32</sup>

Yet the nature of socialist poetry was the subject of debate. In the introduction to her study on socialism and the culture of aestheticism in Britain, Ruth Livesey argues that William Morris and other socialist poets, artists and writers, were trying to create a new and distinct socialist aesthetic that stood in 'creative tension' to the aestheticism of the period. She argues that Morris was central in trying to combine aesthetics with socialism, believing that revolution would come from beauty as well as from a proletarian uprising.<sup>33</sup> This led writers to create lyrical forms that were unfamiliar to the uneducated worker, and therefore less immediately accessible.

Theatre historian Jacky Bratton argues that ballads written by 'writers with causes' were very 'dull' offerings. She decries political poets who used popular forms to preach to the workers, citing William Morris' *Chants for Socialists* as an example. An exception were poets who used the ballad form with 'genuine vigour' and 'full commitment to speaking to the people through their own forms of verse.' These poems, however,

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<sup>29</sup> Sanders, *Poetry of Chartism*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Yeo, 'New Life', 29.

<sup>31</sup> Winchevsky, 'Dos lid funem hemd', *PY*, 29 August 1884.

<sup>32</sup> Invitation to join an anarchist choir. *AF*, 18 September, 1903, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ruth Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914* (Oxford: OUP/British Academy, 2007), 1-10.

represented ‘a literary ideal’, and generally the socialist poetry was only able to communicate to workers who were already on the road to self-improvement.<sup>34</sup>

Winchevsky’s activist and anti-aesthetic stance was in opposition to Morris’ attempts to create a socialist aesthetic that would contribute to the long tradition of English poetry. Winchevsky’s sole aim was to be a *veker*, an awakener, where content was all-important. In a memorial article for the *Forverts* a year after Morris’ death, Winchevsky argued that Morris wrote in a ‘spotless authentic Anglo-Saxon’ which told ‘immortal tales in an immortal way.’ However, the workers needed translation of his poetry into nineteenth century speech. Winchevsky claimed that Morris could give speeches in understandable English, but in doing so he lost his heroic poetic muse which made his art so valuable. In describing this paradox, Winchevsky in effect criticised Morris for being ineffective, because his poetry was inaccessible to an uneducated worker.<sup>35</sup>

Winchevsky, together with other Russian Jewish intellectuals of this period, came from a society where, as Steven Cassedy argues, the connection between creative forms of writing and political activism was part of the literary and political landscape. This blurred distinctions between different types of political activity:

In a society where literature and literary criticism were often the only forum for a written encounter with political issues, novelists, poets, playwrights, and literary critics came to be social commentators, and literary activity came to be a type of political action.<sup>36</sup>

He contends that for these writers their understanding of literary realism was not only that the role of literature was to inspire revolutionary acts, but was itself a revolutionary act. Leonard Prager argues that for these early Yiddish socialists ‘the criterion of usefulness and social relevance dominated Yiddish literature. Neither style nor form mattered much: content was all.’<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Bratton, *Victorian Ballad*, 145.

<sup>35</sup> Winchevsky, ‘Vilyem moris: an erinerung’, *Forverts* 3 October (1897), 3. It is worth noting that Abe Cahan, editor of the New York *Forverts*, used a similar criticism of Winchevsky’s language, calling it ‘a bit too highbrow ... for the simple Jewish worker’. Cahan claimed that: ‘Winchevsky wrote magnificent Yiddish and he had a beautiful Yiddish humour, but most of this humour also demanded a certain grade of development on the part of the reader.’ Abe Cahan, *Bleter* Vol 3, 21. Quoted in Marmor, *Lebn*, 395.

<sup>36</sup> Steven Cassedy, *To the Other Shore: The Russian Jewish Intellectuals Who Came to America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), xxi, 17–18.

<sup>37</sup> Prager, ‘Yiddish Fiction in England’, 250.

Anthems written for political activism had to be easily accessible, designed to be sung by crowds at demonstrations, rallies, open air meetings and marches, to accompany the rhythm of marching and to create a rousing finale to a speech.<sup>38</sup> Anthems, commissioned by trade unions or political parties, were written by professionals and circulated in the press. They had a number of functions: to have a rousing effect on the workers, to assist in organisation, to demonstrate solidarity and to maintain a firm stand.<sup>39</sup> The lyrics were used as acts of political agitation because they made political points and stressed socialist values.<sup>40</sup> They also had to have a universal quality and a sense that victory was possible. It was vital that words were not only easily understood, but that they were entirely fit for purpose. If the purpose of strike songs was to raise money on the streets for striking families, then a careful balance had to be struck. If the lyrics were too fiercely revolutionary they could alienate the public, however if the lyrics described the hard conditions and the greed of the owners, and showed why the strikers were taking this action, then they were more likely to have won the sympathy of the working class public.<sup>41</sup> Some anthems travelled between contexts and countries, becoming international emblems of the left, and translated into other languages.

Probably the best known anthem sung internationally was 'The Marseillaise', originally written in French for the French Revolution. Between 1880 and 1914 socialist and anarchist groups used 'The Marseillaise' to protest in the present whilst claiming a historical connection to the past. The Revolution from a century before still resonated with the working class.<sup>42</sup> Simon Newman, analysing street protests in the early American republic, claims that the 'power and emotion' of 'The Marseillaise' affected many disaffected Americans who identified with the anthem. He argues that, someone whistling 'The Marseillaise' while walking down a street, was a political comment.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, 'The Marseillaise' was also a stock anthem of the Yiddish left. Anarchist Thomas Eyges describes how 'The Marseillaise' was played by musicians to end a

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<sup>38</sup> Yeo, 'New Life', 34–5.

<sup>39</sup> Watson, *Democratic Culture*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> McKinley, *Illegitimate Children*, 130. Laura Mason argues for song's fluid quality. 'Songs overleapt boundaries between politics, entertainment, and the market, to become one of the most easily used means of communication.' Laura Mason, *Singing the French Revolution: Popular Culture and Politics, 1787-1799* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>41</sup> Lloyd, *Folk Song*, 380.

<sup>42</sup> McKinley, *Illegitimate Children*, 131.

<sup>43</sup> Simon Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 177–8.

socialist meeting in Christ Church Hall, Whitechapel.<sup>44</sup> Winchevsky wrote a Yiddish version, 'Di marseyes' in 1889, which was re-printed many times in poetry and song collections.<sup>45</sup> Although Winchevsky's version is in the same structure and meter of the original, and can be sung to the same tune, biographer Kalman Marmor argued that it had 'scant connection' to the original and simply used the title as a 'potent symbol'.<sup>46</sup> The word 'Marseillaise' became symbolic, and the poem 'Es rirt zikh' (It's moving), written for what was later called the 'Bloody Sunday' demonstration in Trafalgar Square in 1887, became known as 'Winchevsky's Marseillaise'.<sup>47</sup>

Although the socialist meeting Eyges attended was in a church hall, most of the Yiddish socialist meetings took place in pubs such as the Sugar Loaf<sup>48</sup> and Berner Street Club:

The club was a spacious room, with a capacity of over 200 people, and contained a stage. Here were performed by amateurs mostly in Russian language plays by well known Russian revolutionaries – Tchaikovsky (not the famous composer), Volchovsky, Stepniak, Winchevsky, Gallop; later came Simon Kahn, Krantz, Feigenbaum, Yanovsky, and others... intellectuals that came frequently in Berner Street Club, taking an active part in spreading the gospel of revolutionary socialism.<sup>49</sup>

William Morris regularly visited the club and was treated as a respected and honoured guest. He read his own poetry, gave speeches and the choir sang his songs.<sup>50</sup> In turn Morris supported the fledgling Yiddish-speaking socialist groups with the sort of encouragement not always meted out by the English socialists to their Jewish counterparts. Anarchist leader Saul Yanovsky remembers a Yiddish 'tea-party' where he moaned to Morris about his single-handed work for the *Arbayter fraynd*, giving weekly lectures and free English classes. He recalls that Morris:

shook my hand with great warmth, telling me, that people like me make him certain that the time of freedom is not far away. This compliment made me feel in seventh heaven and his handshake was the greatest reward for me.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, in 1890 Morris chaired and gave the opening speech at the fifth anniversary celebration of the *Arbayter fraynd* at the Berner Street Club. He shared the platform

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<sup>44</sup> Eyges, *Horizon*, 78.

<sup>45</sup> Winchevsky, 'Di marseyes', *LK*, 118; Winchevsky, *LUG*. (New York: Maisel and Company, 1910), 129; *Gezamelte verk: lider*. (New York: Astoria Press, 1927), 71–2; *Di fraye harfe* (Warsaw: Ferlags drukeray, 1907), 33–4; *Der londoner arbayter zinger* (London: Arbayter fraynd drukeray, 1894), 11–12.

<sup>46</sup> Marmor, *Lebn*, 140.

<sup>47</sup> A Prints, 'Vintshevskis lider', *MF*, 27 March 1932.

<sup>48</sup> Rucker and Ward, *London Years*, 26–7; Fishman, *Radicals*, 219.

<sup>49</sup> Eyges, *Horizon*, 79.

<sup>50</sup> On William Morris and the Berner Street club see *Ibid.*, 79–83; Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 127–8; Fishman, *Radicals*, 192–4.

<sup>51</sup> Shaul Yanovski, *Ershte yorn*, 182–3.

with Winchevsky whom he warmly introduced as ‘our beloved friend’. When the poetry had finished, the choir sang Morris’s ‘Down Among the Dead Men’.<sup>52</sup>

The English and Yiddish socialists were similarly using poetry as a way of engaging with the workers they were trying to reach. The socialist leaders were involved in the debate about aesthetics and accessibility, and were united in their concern about the popularity of commercial popular culture. The socialists believed that, if they got it right, as well as holding the socialist message, the arts could open people’s minds and release their potential, and this would enable them to respond to ‘more progressive political philosophies’.<sup>53</sup> However, they were somewhat thwarted by the huge success of the English and Yiddish music halls and the commercial Yiddish theatre.

### *The early Yiddish theatre*

The commercial Yiddish theatre was established in Russia by Abraham Goldfaden. Goldfaden was a prolific playwright who wrote popular plays and songs from the mid 1860s to the 1890s which were constantly performed across the Yiddish speaking world. He wrote in a variety of genres: satirical comedies, biblical romantic operettas, and serious dramas on biblical themes.<sup>54</sup> They were popular for the emotion, the spectacle and the melodramatic style in which they were performed. Yiddish acting style was ‘unsubtle, broad and electric. [Actors] swept and stamped about, declaimed in big voices, rolled their eyes, gestured operatically, wept... [They] had little or no training and would make up lines if they forgot the originals.’<sup>55</sup> Essential to the drama were Yiddish songs, included whether or not the play was an operetta or musical comedy, and whether or not it had any relevance to the narrative action.<sup>56</sup> Actors also performed *kupletn* between acts or at the end of the play. These were clowning, comic or satirical songs in rhyming couplets, often reproduced in Yiddish music halls.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *AF*, 13 June 1890. For an overview of the relationship between the English and Yiddish socialists, see Rucker and Ward, *London Years*, 101–5.

<sup>53</sup> Russell, *Popular Music*, 50.

<sup>54</sup> Mazower, *Yiddish Theatre*, 11. Mazower lists satirical comedies performed in London, such as *Shmendrik* (1877) and *The Two Kuni Lemels* (1980), biblical romantic operettas such as *Shulamis* (1880), and serious dramas on biblical themes such as *Bar Kochba* (1887).

<sup>55</sup> Sandrow, *Vagabond*, 98–9. Sandrow relates how the actor David Kessler, who regularly visited London, was generally hoarse in the fourth act of a play after he had yelled through the first three.

<sup>56</sup> In Goldfaden’s opera *shulamis*, the song ‘The vow’ is a duet that forwards the plot but the song ‘Almonds and raisins’ is a popular lullaby totally unrelated to the plot. Nahma Sandrow, ‘Romanticism and the Yiddish Theatre’, in *New Approaches*, ed. Berkowitz, 2003, 50.

<sup>57</sup> Sandrow, *Vagabond*, 127; Mazower, *Yiddish Theatre*, 12; Prager, *Yiddish Culture*, 51.

The commercial plays, nicknamed *shund* (trash) by their opponents, were loved by the working class immigrant audiences.<sup>58</sup> American author Ruth Gay argues ‘it was not only the circus atmosphere of lights, tights, and music - it was also a time for these young people to feel proud of themselves. Having come from a life of fear, humiliation and deprivation, they gloried in the image of themselves as heroic and glamorous figures.’<sup>59</sup>

Yiddish critics have been keen to show the division that evolved between *kunst*, literary theatre which was pedagogic, enlightened and ‘nation building, and *shund*, popular theatre and song which was low-brow, lacked ‘educational purpose’ and had an ‘unruly environment’.<sup>60</sup> Trying to find an alternative to the comedies, musicals and melodramas, playwright Jacob Gordin began writing more realistic theatre. His plays addressed problematic social issues, both siding with tradition and challenging it.<sup>61</sup> In New York, Gordin and Abraham Cahan, editor of the *Forverts*, campaigned to transform *shund* theatre into ‘institutions for “highbrow” and cosmopolitan European culture.’ They considered realistic Yiddish theatre a vital force for education and enlightenment which could politicise the masses by understanding society and ‘so trigger the demand for change.’<sup>62</sup>

However, it was the commercial theatre that got the audiences, and with repertoires changing every week a large amount of new material was needed to keep up with demand. Playwrights often ‘baked’ plays. They took plays in other languages, famous or not, changed them to have a Yiddish flavour in names and locations, translated them and put them out as their own compositions.<sup>63</sup> This was not always successful. In a review in the *Poylishe yidl*, Winchevsky was bemused by a translation of Schiller:

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<sup>58</sup> Sandrow uses the term ‘high *shund*’ to describe the melodrama-operettas set in ‘exotic lands’ in ‘courts of sultans and emperors’. ‘The plots wandered on and on, providing twists and thrills; comedians turned somersaults and made vulgar puns’. Sandrow, *Vagabond*, 111–2.

<sup>59</sup> Jacob Gordin and Ruth Gay, ‘Inventing a Yiddish Theatre in America’, in *The Jewish King Lear: A Comedy in America*, ed. Ruth Gay and Sophie Glazer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 90.

<sup>60</sup> Nina Warnke, ‘The Child Who Wouldn’t Grow Up: Yiddish Theatre and It’s Critics’, in *New Approaches*, ed. Berkowitz, 2003, 204.

<sup>61</sup> Joel Berkowitz, ‘This Is Not Europe, You Know: The Counter-Maskilic Impulse of American Yiddish Drama’, in *Yiddish in America: Essays on Yiddish Culture in the Golden Land*, ed. Edward Shapiro (Scranton: Weinberg Judaic Studies Institute, University of Scranton, 2008), 144–6.

<sup>62</sup> Warnke, ‘Popular Culture’, 323–4.

<sup>63</sup> Sandrow, *Vagabond*, 108.

Mr Herman Fiddler's translation is not bad. However he moved it to Russia and Schiller's characters were converted to Judaism... The translation would have been much better if he would have left Schiller's play where it is in the world and not changed the Gentiles to Jews with troubles, particularly because in the last act they all die.<sup>64</sup>

It is important, however, not to simplify this debate, as it is more complex and contested than the polarised positions suggest. Writing on the Yiddish theatre, Berkowitz argues against seeing a separation between *kunst* and *shund*. He argues that Yiddish performance should be seen as a 'network of intersecting paths', where some led to aesthetic plays, and some were entertainment, but many possessed 'qualities that could both impress critics and liberati while pleasing a wider public.'<sup>65</sup>

Most actors and writers were versatile and relied on the mass entertainment of the Yiddish theatre to earn their living. They had to write quickly and for mass appeal, knew that the material was silly and irreverent, but that it made them money, so they juggled the types of work they did. For example, Joseph Markovitsh had toured Eastern Europe as a classical chorister, but began life in London on the music-hall stage. He wrote both edgy music-hall songs, with *double entendres* and comic themes, and serious songs about anti-Semitic violence and community foibles which demanded more thoughtful engagement.<sup>66</sup> Even Jacob Gordin, under the pseudonym 'Dr Jacobi from London', wrote popular plays like the ones he detested because those were the plays that got audiences and made money, and he had a large family to feed.<sup>67</sup>

The word *shund* (trash) is a problematic term which conveyed the elitist views of the highbrow critics who derided popular culture as worthless. They may not have appreciated the value of popular culture, yet that does not mean that the commercial theatre had no value. The highbrow journalists and writers who were published in the Yiddish press may have been generally of one mind, yet the actors and writers knew

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<sup>64</sup> Winchevsky, 'Idisher teatr in london', *PY*, 15 August, 1884. For many illiterate immigrants theatre was their introduction to world literature, from Yiddish translations of Shakespeare, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Dumas, Sardou and Strindberg, and the classic Yiddish writers, Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Ash, Y L Peretz, Jacob Gordin. Bernard Mendelovitch, *Memories of London Yiddish Theatre* (Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1990), 1.

<sup>65</sup> Henry and Berkowitz, *Inventing*, 9–10.

<sup>66</sup> Mazower, 'Stories in Song', 127–37. Mazower describes how Markovitsh had to satisfy the 'conflicting demands of the audience, his fellow actors, the highbrow critics, and his own artistic conscience.' *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>67</sup> Berkowitz, 'Not Europe', 146.

that they could produce quality across both genres.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, as will be seen in the following chapters, the Anglo-Yiddish popular texts have fluid boundaries. There are music-hall songs, layered with meanings and connotations, offering levels of engagement that range from belly laughs to serious ideas. And there are socialist poems being put to music and published in songbooks and declaimed from the stages of the London popular theatre.

Yiddish theatre had been performed in London since March 1880 with a play by Goldfaden in 'Yosel's pub'. Early East End Yiddish theatre consisted of performances by amateurs and semi-professionals, producing plays in clubs or halls.<sup>69</sup> Yiddish Theatre critic Samuel Harendorf described how performances would take place in unauthorised places on makeshift stages where people would throw coins into a pot for payment. If there was not enough in the pot to pay the actors, an appeal would be for more money before the play began.<sup>70</sup> During the 1880s theatrical productions in London were prohibited anywhere other than in an official theatre. So Yiddish theatre did what small English theatre troupes were doing, they set up nominal private clubs. Generally in the back rooms of bars, club members would pay around a shilling a week and non-members 'made arrangements' on the door.<sup>71</sup>

The early Yiddish theatre in London was chaotic. Myer Landa describes impromptu stages, inappropriate scenery, costumes from different historical eras in the same play, a visible prompter and poor acting. He argues that audiences put up with these failures and anachronisms because they valued the experience of plays that 'mirrored their own lives, or those of their ancestors in the troubled past, or their unhappy brethren of the present.'<sup>72</sup> The 'club' nature of the early Yiddish theatre served the immigrant community well because the theatre had 'many functions apart from being a house of entertainment and culture. It was a meeting place for *landslayt* (kinsmen) to meet and discuss their problems, to seek help and advice, to provide a sense of belonging.'<sup>73</sup> Jewish immigrant workers came to the clubs together with their families 'to eat and

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<sup>68</sup> Mazower, email correspondence, 23 June 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Prager gives examples of the Berner Street Club of the anarchists, the Mantle Makers dramatic club and the Arbeter Ring. Prager, *Yiddish Culture*, 50–1.

<sup>70</sup> Harendorf, 'Yidish teatr', 228.

<sup>71</sup> Sandrow, *Vagabond*, 71.

<sup>72</sup> Landa, *The Jew in Drama*, 285–9. Quote, 288.

<sup>73</sup> Mendelovitch, *Memories*, 1.



drink, play a round of cards or a game of chess, talk politics, share news of relatives back home in Russia and be entertained by the Yiddish actors.<sup>74</sup>

In 1883, the Yiddish theatre became professional with the arrival from Riga of the already famous actor Jacob Adler, later nicknamed ‘The Jewish Irving’.<sup>75</sup> Adler (a distant relative of Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler), recalled in his memoirs that clubs were abundant: ‘A thousand clubs! Wherever you looked, clubs, splits, shouting, quarrels, and before you knew it – a new club! They were a training ground for our acting recruits, the chief source of our theatrical merchandise.’<sup>76</sup> Adler and his small theatre troupe set up the Russian Jewish Operatic Company in January 1884. Over the next two years they performed in clubs and halls ‘musical productions ranging in quality from quasi-opera to low vaudeville’, performing three plays a week in repertory and changing plays frequently.<sup>77</sup> In his memoirs, the actor Boez Yong describes hearing the actors Mr and Mrs Gradner singing on stage at the Princes Street Club before leaving on tour. The song stayed in his mind as he worked at the tailor’s machine, and its power brought tears to his eyes remembering them.<sup>78</sup>

The socialists had an ambivalent view of the Yiddish theatre. On one hand they wanted it to develop as edifying entertainment performing classics. When Winchevsky published his first poem ‘Tsvey geslekh’ (two alleys) in the third edition of the *Poylishe yidl*, Jacob Adler proclaimed it from the Yiddish stage. His rendition was proudly advertised in the same paper.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand the socialists were constantly let down by the lack of quality in the Yiddish theatre. One review in the *Poylishe yidl*, not without a dose of satire, describes:

For two years, edifying us here, there has been a small troupe of bad actors (with one or two good ones). On a small stage they have SUNG very poorly and have SPOKEN very badly. I have been there a few times, have seen, heard, sweated and caught a cold. The acting did not please me, I didn’t understand the singing, the sweat annoyed me.... There was a quarrel. The quarrel became a fight, from the fight came a few black eyes, After an hour I began to curse the whole event.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Mazower, *Yiddish Theatre*, 13.

<sup>75</sup> Henry Irving (1838-1905) was possibly the most famous classical English actor on the Victorian stage.

<sup>76</sup> Adler and Rosenfeld, *Life on Stage*, 256.

<sup>77</sup> Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 260.

<sup>78</sup> Yong, *Mayn lebn in teatr*, 52.

<sup>79</sup> *PY*, 15, 22 and 29 August 1884, 8.

<sup>80</sup> *PY*, 25 July 1884, 2-3. Other reviews were also far from complimentary. Describing the play ‘Di mames zindl’ (The Mother’s Sin): ‘Of the women, Madame Chisik excelled, but more for her singing than her acting, because she hadn’t learned the words well.’ *PY*, 22 Aug 1884, 7. These reviews have no

Socialists, however, were theatre-goers, and other reviews were broadly positive and complimented good acting, though more often they criticised over-acting and in particular actors not knowing their lines.<sup>81</sup>

Adler and his troupe started at a club in Lambert Street, later moving to 10 Houndsditch. He became a celebrity creating a vibrant ethos in London Yiddish theatre. He hired a music teacher to teach music notation and singing, advertising in the Yiddish press for people to join the chorus, and to enrol in their new music school. He then used these students in his chorus for larger operettas.<sup>82</sup>

Wanting to expand into more serious theatre, Adler found a sponsor in the butcher and theatre lover Dovid Shmit, and in March 1886 the new Hebrew Dramatic Club opened in Prince's Street. Yong, describes how, being a 'club', they had to conduct themselves as a club with a committee and a president:

In the middle of the theatre was a long table with bottles, the committee sat around the table, with their backs to the stage. The president held a hammer in his hand. The waiters served food. When the president had finished eating, he gave a ring on a bell, and the curtain lifted up.<sup>83</sup>

Despite the prestigious opening of the Princes Street Club, the success of full houses and actors finally being paid a good wage,<sup>84</sup> the tensions within the community were a constant strain on the new theatre. Antagonism came from different quarters. The Anglo-Jewish establishment saw support for Yiddish culture as a provocation to the desired process of anglicisation, the orthodox saw the content and running of the theatre in opposition to Jewish religious law and custom and the socialists, as explored earlier, wanted a more high-brow medium.

The Anglo-Jewish leadership's primary aim was to encourage immigrants to acculturate as quickly as possible into an English way of life, and they saw the Yiddish theatre as a

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author, but were probably by Winchevsky. Winchevsky, *Erinerungen, gezamelte verk* Vol. 10 (New York: Freiheit, 1927), 206.

<sup>81</sup> For example, *PY*, 8, 15, 27 August 1884; 7 November 1884.

<sup>82</sup> Harendorf, 'Yidish teatr', 233. Adler's acting and music schools were advertised in the *PY* from 5 September 1884 each week. The acting school advert stated: 'Mr Adler the famous Yiddish actor needs young men and women to learn stagecraft. Come every day 8-3 to 9 Raven Row E or in person in the Yiddish Dramatic Club'. The music school was: 'Offering cheap music lessons for young men and women.'

<sup>83</sup> Yong, *Mayn lebn in teatr*, 51.

<sup>84</sup> Adler was paid £3 10/- a week, 'more than enough to keep him in style.' Mazower, *Yiddish Theatre*, 13.

retrograde step in this process.<sup>85</sup> The popularity of the Yiddish theatre was seen as maintaining the status of Yiddish and so encouraging the use of Yiddish as a language to the detriment of English. The Yiddish theatre therefore came to represent the immigrants' lack of desire to acculturate, in their choice of speaking *zhargon* rather than English. In addition, Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler and Hermann Adler spoke and communicated in English and did not know Yiddish. So they saw the use of Yiddish as divisive and an obstacle in their constant attempts to assert their authority as the representative of Judaism in England. Paradoxically, the Anglo-Jewish community also saw the Yiddish theatre as a forum for the socialists and anarchists to put across their ideas and give out provocative radical literature.<sup>86</sup> Finally, there was particular concern that the Yiddish theatre and music hall encouraged a move away from religious practice into immoral behaviour.

Orthodox Jews opposed the Yiddish theatre for its profanation of the Sabbath by opening on Friday nights and Saturday afternoons, which were, indeed, the most profitable times.<sup>87</sup> On the stage, the actors might smoke on the Sabbath and commit other profanities. Off-stage, actors' behaviour was seen as provocative. Jacob Adler, a married man, was known to have affairs, and one young actress Jenya (Dzheni Kayzer) used to come to rehearsals with her three-year-old son Charlie Adler in tow.<sup>88</sup> These considerations made both Anglo-Jewry and the orthodox immigrants consider the theatre as a dangerous place for their young people to be around.

Landa argues that orthodox immigrants did sometimes go to the Yiddish theatre, to enjoy the humour, the melodies and the pride the plays instilled in Jewish history.<sup>89</sup> However, the Chief Rabbinate and the immigrant orthodox were united in their opposition, and the religious leaders of both communities tried to find ways of closing down the Yiddish theatre. They put pressure on Dovid Shmit to stop financing the Prince's Street Club by threatening to blacklist his butcher's shop, affecting his livelihood as a kosher butcher. Shmit retaliated and declared that he would not be

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<sup>85</sup> Mendelovitch, *Memories*, 2.

<sup>86</sup> Rosenfeld, *Bright Star*, 165; Harendorf, 'Yidish teatr', 233.

<sup>87</sup> Landa, *The Jew in Drama*, 284.

<sup>88</sup> Yong, *Mayn lebn in teatr*, 53–4. Rosenfeld relates how Dinah Shtettin from a religious family, left home at sixteen and became a chorus girl, living with the Gradner's. When her father found out, Jacob Adler intervened calling the theatre an honourable profession. Dinah was also in love with Adler and, as his protégé, it set up rivalries. Rosenfeld, *Bright Star*, 181.

<sup>89</sup> Landa, *The Jew in Drama*, 284.

terrorised, and if they would not permit him to sell meat under the kosher *shechita* he would turn to merchandise that was *treyf* (unclean) leaving Jews unknowingly buying non-kosher meat.<sup>90</sup>

The Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler preached from the pulpit against the Yiddish theatre, calling it a ‘synagogue for sin and apostasy’, seeing it as serious competition for the synagogues, and, indeed, many Jews did attend the theatre more often than prayers. The Chief Rabbi offered a bribe to Jacob Adler to go to New York, but in the flush of the success of the Prince’s Street Club, Adler saw no reason to leave.<sup>91</sup> The Chief Rabbi kept up the pressure, complaining so strongly that a production of ‘Hannah and her Sons’ was sacrilegious that the play was changed to another. He created an outcry when a *shofer* (ritual ram’s horn) was blown onstage in the play *Uriel Acosta*, calling it desecration of a holy object, so it was replaced with a paper one.<sup>92</sup>

Dovid Shmit encouraged the actors not to antagonise religious Jews when not on stage, not to smoke on the Sabbath, not to eat *treyf* food and not to socialise with the Jewish underworld.<sup>93</sup> Jacob Adler was affected by the religious pressure, in his memoirs he wrote that he lived

a life of fear [with] the stick held over our heads by the orthodox community... We were always afraid they would report us, and had to give in to their every caprice... We had to watch every move, every word, or in the middle of the play there would be a scandal.<sup>94</sup>

Tragically, the Princes Street Club came to a premature end on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 1887, when mid-play, at the shout of ‘fire’, there was a rush for the doors of the theatre. There was no fire, but amid the stampede 17 people died. The Jewish East End, in mourning for months afterwards, kept away from the theatre. The club closed, and Jacob Adler, taking the money offered by Nathan Adler, took his company to America. This left no resident professional company, and permanent home for the Yiddish theatre. However, theatre continued in a hall in Vine Court off Whitechapel Road, and from the early 1890s, in greater earnest, in the Pavilion Theatre also in Whitechapel.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Harendorf, ‘Yidish teatr’, 233.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 235-6.

<sup>92</sup> Sandrow, *Vagabond*, 72.

<sup>93</sup> Harendorf, ‘Yidish teatr’, 234.

<sup>94</sup> Adler and Rosenfeld, *Life on Stage*, 257.

<sup>95</sup> The Princes Street Club manager Abraham Smith, had posited that the accident had been deliberately caused by the jealousy of the manager of the Russian National Club in Lambeth Street. Mazower, *Yiddish Theatre*, 14–15. The *JC* editor Asher Myers, who was known to castigate the immigrants for

## Part 2: 1894-1904

In 1894 the German anarchist Rudolf Rocker came to England. Rocker became involved with the East End Yiddish anarchists, took over editorship of the *Arbayter fraynd* and helped organise strikes and trade union activism on the left. He became a popular speaker who often lectured in the now anarchist Berner Street club, which also became home to the *Arbayter fraynd* press.<sup>96</sup> Under Rocker's editorship the *Arbayter fraynd* continued with growing readership, but rarely published poetry at all, and when it did, it was from known poets, not parochial Yiddish-speaking immigrants. The exception was in 1896 where there was a stream of poetry from the socialist poet Avrom Radutski, who worked in Mitchell's cigarette factory in Glasgow.<sup>97</sup>

During the decade 1894-1904 the London cultural scene greatly expanded and changed as new immigrants, bringing new ideologies with them, demanded different types of culture. The two major ideological movements that affected cultural output were the Jewish Labour *Bund* and Zionism.

The Jewish Labour *Bund* was founded in Vilna in 1897. It organised strikes, distributed revolutionary literature and tried to build a movement of workers to help improve living conditions. The organisation was structured with a central committee and local groups. The *Bund* was illegal in Russia, and in 1898 there was an unexpected wave of arrests of *bundist* leaders which decimated the core activists. As new leaders emerged, some of those arrested escaped bail or prison and fled to other countries in Europe setting up *bundist* cells there. Although the *Bund's* original intent was not to be a Jewish organisation, it was seen as Jewish in membership and character, and the early *bundist* movement struggled to define its position around Jewish nationalism and autonomy, and later around socialist Zionism. Under Plehve, the Russian minister of the interior, thousands of members of the *Bund* were arrested in 1901–2 leading again to members escaping abroad.<sup>98</sup> The changes in the immigrant population to Britain affected both who was writing material and the audiences they were writing for.

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their 'alleged isolationism', explained that the Princes Street Club fire was because of isolationism, and it proved that people should not go to the Yiddish theatre. Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, 78.

<sup>96</sup> For Rocker's activism in London and *Zherminal* see Rocker and Ward, *London Years*, 62–97.

<sup>97</sup> Prager, *Yiddish Culture*, 540–1.

<sup>98</sup> For these early years of the Bund, see Levin, *Jewish Socialist Movements*, 261–79; Frankel, *Prophecy*, 171–246.

In 1900 the publication of the *Arbayter fraynd* was interrupted for a period due to financial trouble and Rocker set up the intellectual cultural periodical *Zherminal*, that came out monthly between 1901 and 1903 and then periodically until 1909. However, this did not feature poetry amongst its literary articles.

In 1900 the weekly Leeds newspaper, the *Idisher ekspres*, moved to London. As well as the news, it published occasional theatre notices, reviews and features on the Yiddish theatre and frequent popular poetry and verse from local and international writers. Written from a mainstream religious bias, the *Idisher ekspres* took the side of the immigrant community, reporting on their hard economic situation and unemployment. It supported strikers and, when the *Jewish Chronicle* criticised the strikers, the *Idisher ekspres* leapt to their defence, criticising the *Jewish Chronicle*. It was the first of the first Jewish newspapers to support Herzl, and report different aspects of Zionism.<sup>99</sup> Other newspapers which lasted short amounts of time included the *Teglikher ekspres* in 1897, the orthodox *Brils speshel* and *Brils telefon* in 1901, the weekly *Idishe prese* in 1903 and the Zionist *Idishe tsukunft* in 1904. None of these smaller Yiddish papers published poetry.

During this decade the publication of Yiddish music-hall songs flourished. Yiddish publisher, printer, bookseller and binder Refuel Mazin published English-Hebrew-Yiddish calendars from 1891 and by the early 1900s was producing music-hall penny songsheets.<sup>100</sup> The publisher and bookseller M. Yozef wrote parodies to known melodies to be sung on the street advertising his wares, including Yiddish music-hall song collections.<sup>101</sup> Both Yozef and Mazin wrote songs themselves or added relevant local verses to known songs.

The Anglo-Jewish press began begrudgingly to acknowledge Yiddish as a serious language and the Yiddish theatre as a permanent feature. From 1900 the *Jewish World* published articles on Yiddish literary figures such as Abraham Cahan, Morris Rosenfeld and Abraham Goldfaden. In its introduction to 'Max Rosenthal: The Forbes-Robertson of the Yiddish Stage', it acknowledged:

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<sup>99</sup> Jacob Hodes, 'English-yidishe prese', 61–2.

<sup>100</sup> Prager, *Yiddish Culture*, 447–8.

<sup>101</sup> Yozef, 'A finfter hashiveynu nazad'. SY.

“Yiddish” is no longer so despised as was the custom in former years, and the men and women who in that language have charmed the ears and eyes of thousands of people, need no longer hide their light under a bushel...there are some singers and great actors, who utilise nothing but the language spoken by the Jews of Russia, Galicia and Rumania.<sup>102</sup>

The *Jewish Chronicle*, which rarely focused on the Yiddish speaking community, produced a long, if rather surly, article in 1902 when it looked like a Yiddish Theatre was going to be established in Hackney: ‘There are no doubt those who view such an enterprise with displeasure, but granting that it is to be, they would hope that the promoters would work on the very best lines.’ The article demanded restrictions in line with Sabbath observance, and reassured their readers that ‘no gags will be permitted of the slightest “risky” business, [as] they believe the higher the tone, the greater will be their success.’<sup>103</sup>

### ***The music halls***

The anxiety expressed in the *Jewish Chronicle* may well have been about the increase in both popular theatre and Yiddish music halls, in part due to new writers and performers arriving from Eastern Europe. Ayzik Batkhn Lubritski had come to London from Poland possibly as early as the mid 1880s and worked as a *batkhn* (wedding jester). By the mid-1890s he was writing songs to be sung in the music hall. Arn Nager arrived around 1898 and Joseph Markovitsh at the turn of the twentieth century. Both Nager and Markovitsh worked as actors and singers and wrote plays and songs. By 1900 Yiddish theatres were running in the Pavilion Theatre in Whitechapel, the Standard Theatre in Shoreditch (from 1896), and from 1902–3 the Manor Theatre in Hackney. The Yiddish music hall came into its own for a decade or more. The York Minster music hall in Philpot Street was managed by Sali and Filip Vayznfraynd, the parents of the later American actor Paul Muni.<sup>104</sup> There were also Yiddish music-hall nights at ‘Wonderland’ on Whitechapel Road and the Princess’ Hall from 1907. Mazower argues that any space was commandeered for a Yiddish stage, including covering over the Goulston Street baths.<sup>105</sup>

The Anglo-Jewish community held a hypocritical position. They expressed anxiety about so-called *shund* and feared for a Yiddish equivalent, yet Anglo-Jews frequented

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<sup>102</sup> ‘Max Rosenthal: The Forbes-Robertson of the Yiddish Stage’, *Jewish World* 30 November, 1900, 151.

<sup>103</sup> ‘A Yiddish Theatre for London’ *JC*, 4 April 1902

<sup>104</sup> For the Muni’s time in London, see Lawrence, *Paul Muni*, 25–7.

<sup>105</sup> Mazower, *Yiddish Theatre*, 16.

English music halls, where the stock character of ‘the Jew’ was a common act by ‘Hebrew comedians’. Although Landa argues that in general the Jew was ‘delineated as a pleasant fellow in the variety theatres’, this view was contested by contemporary commentator Y Finkelshteyn.<sup>106</sup> Finkelshteyn complains that the ‘Hebrew comedian’ was complicit in making anti-Semitic stereotypes that became the butt of tasteless humour:

The “Hebrew comedian” is not properly a Jew hater. He is usually himself a Jew and he makes fun of Jews for a living. It is a fact that he cannot distinguish himself in his profession and can only be successful as a good “Jewish” comic, yet his “jokes” about Jews are full of venom and brand the Jew as a lower creature, a swindler, an arsonist and the like.<sup>107</sup>

Hebrew comedians were popular fare of the English music hall where the stereotypes played into the prejudices of the English audiences.<sup>108</sup> Yet the Jew was one of a range of cultural stereotypes, and the Victorian and early Edwardian music hall was the main arena in England to hear live popular song from famous singers. Working class youth with expendable income would flock to hear their favourite stars.<sup>109</sup>

By the turn of the century when Yiddish songwriters were writing for the early Yiddish music halls in London, the English halls had been in full swing for half a century. The English music halls had developed from the informal pub culture of the ‘free-and-easy’, which was an ‘amateur sing-song’.<sup>110</sup> In the back room of a pub, singers and performers from the audience would do a ‘turn’ on a makeshift stage. Turns could be folk and industrial songs or political and comic ballads, sung to a mixed audience of men and

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<sup>106</sup> Landa, *The Jew in Drama*, 275.

<sup>107</sup> Y. Finkelshteyn, ‘Hibru komedyes: “artistn” vos makhn a lebn fun bashmutsikn dos idische folk’, *Tsayt*, 22 January 1914, 2. An arsonist (*fayermakher*) was an anti-Semitic stereotype of a Jew used in the English music halls. See Marshall, ‘Ambivalent Images’, 68; Henry Chance Newton, *Cues and Curtain Calls: Being the Theatrical Reminiscences of H. Chance Newton (‘Carados’ of the Referee)* (California: John Lane, 1927), 256–7; Christie Davies, ‘Exploring the Thesis of the Self-Depreciating Jewish Sense of Humor’, in *Semites and Stereotypes: Characteristics of Jewish Humor*, ed. Avner Ziv and Anat Zajdman (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 38–9. This stereotype can also be seen in anti-Semitic postcards of the time, such as ‘Faule Fische und Makes’ from c. 1901. <http://www.chgs.umn.edu/histories/otherness/otherness1-3.html>

<sup>108</sup> For an examination of how Jews were portrayed by Hebrew comedians, see Marshall, ‘Ambivalent Images’, 63–72. These stock characters had a powerful impact, shown in Glover’s assessment of how stock Jewish characters from melodrama moved into theatre and fiction. Glover, *Literature, Immigration*, 87–99.

<sup>109</sup> Michael Childs J, *Labour’s Apprentices: Working-Class Lads in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Hambledon Press, 1992), 118.

<sup>110</sup> Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, 29.



women, socialising, drinking, singing raucous choruses and laughing at the humour.<sup>111</sup> Partly motivated by the police cracking down on the ‘rowdyism’ of these evenings, but more generally motivated by the commercial possibilities of professionalising popular entertainment, purpose-built music halls were set up by publicans and entrepreneurs, who became proprietors of these new establishments.<sup>112</sup> This venture became a huge commercial success and, from its working class beginnings, new halls developed with large middle and upper-class variety theatres and music halls in the West End and suburbs. Smaller music halls still proliferated and continued in poorer districts.<sup>113</sup> The performers would move between venues, performing at a number of different types of hall in one night. It was the working class halls that had the closest affinity to the Yiddish music halls.

The smaller English music halls were often built as extensions to pubs, which had a more informal atmosphere and were significantly different to a theatre where the audience sat and watched.<sup>114</sup> The music hall audience could be seated, but was generally mobile. Men and women could walk around, meet, talk, eat and drink.<sup>115</sup> They could come in for their favourite acts and leave afterwards.<sup>116</sup> They could be sociable and entertained without being ‘disciplined’ or ‘improved’ by reformers or socialists. It was a place to be oneself and was affordable.<sup>117</sup> Peter Bailey sees the music halls as having features of ‘the pleasure-garden-cum-promenade, the pub, club and parlour, the marketplace-cum-fairground, the street, the betting shop, the brothel and the dance hall’, and at times also had elements of ‘the lecture room and the school.’<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Vicinus, *Industrial Muse*, 238. Vicinus explains that the free-and-easy was about eating and drinking with varied entertainment. The music hall, on the other hand focused on the entertainment, with drink available.

<sup>112</sup> David Craig, *The Real Foundations; Literature and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 89. Craig quotes Alfred Williams in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (1923) describing how, in the Thames Valley in the second half of the nineteenth century, rowdy singing in pubs was crushed by the police. Complaints to the pub landlords led to the publicans asking their customers not to sing, as a form of self-protection on their licenses.

<sup>113</sup> *Harpers New Monthly Magazine* (1891) writes of four groups of music halls: the aristocratic variety theatre of West End; smaller less aristocratic West End music halls; large bourgeois music halls in less fashionable parts and suburbs, and minor music halls of the poor and ‘squalid’ districts. Quoted in Steve Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism, and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 20.

<sup>114</sup> Stedman Jones, ‘Working Class Culture’, 490.

<sup>115</sup> Vicinus describes how the drink and smoke, coupled with the close proximity of women, made a ‘giddy and inviting atmosphere’ and so enabled men to speak to women uninhibited by their shyness. Vicinus, *Industrial Muse*, 250.

<sup>116</sup> Summerfield, ‘Effingham Arms’, 219.

<sup>117</sup> Kift, *Victorian Music Hall*, 176.

<sup>118</sup> Peter Bailey, ‘Custom, Capital and Culture in the Victorian Music Hall’, in *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. Robert Storch D. (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 204.

The evening's entertainment would consist of male and female professional performers doing 'turns', of mainly comic songs.<sup>119</sup> Performers generally sang in character and became associated with, and famous for, their characters and songs. There were stock characters such as the upper class swell and the fake swell, the working-class coster and the working girl, husbands, wives and mothers and the cheeky female comic. Women performers had a rare opportunity to gain independence and a fortune.<sup>120</sup> There was the potential for women to create characters or cross dress and subvert the norms around gender roles.<sup>121</sup> However, these possibilities were often offset by the association of actresses with prostitution, putting pressure on women to conform, and most of women's roles were highly traditional.<sup>122</sup> Songs would be about marriage, lodgers and mothers-in-law, beer and holidays, patriotism and war, work and London.<sup>123</sup> The songs and characters did not attempt realistic portrayals of working-class life, rather they exaggerated class differences 'as a source of fun and pride'.<sup>124</sup> Music-hall stars would buy both songs and the performing copyright from song-writers, and develop their own exclusive repertoire, singing to piano accompaniment in the smaller halls or a whole orchestra in the larger ones.<sup>125</sup> The verbal repartee was generally full of 'bad puns... rhyme, alliteration, riddles, plays on the words and the comic use of every real and imaginary dialect and variation upon standard English' and catch-phrases, choruses and innuendos gave 'limitless scope' for the enjoyment of the word-play.<sup>126</sup> The language of the songs' characters was reminiscent of the streets and the differences in style created a dramatic tension 'between the vulgar and the pretentious' and provided the edgy feel to

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<sup>119</sup> By 1912 sketches became popular and the Lord Chamberlain granted theatre licenses to music halls on the proviso that every sketch was balanced by six songs. Dave Russell, 'Varieties of Life: The Making of the Edwardian Music Hall', in *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage*, ed. Michael Booth and Joel Kaplan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 69.

<sup>120</sup> Jacky Bratton describes the work of Jenny Hill who played sympathetic portrayals of working-class girls: a waitress; serving girl; street saleswoman and downtrodden mothers, disillusioned wives and elderly women. She included high speed comic patter attempting to defy music-hall censorship. Jacky Bratton, 'Jenny Hill: Sex and Sexism in the Victorian Music Hall', in *Music Hall: Performance and Style*, ed. Jacky Bratton and Ann Featherstone (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), 92–106.

<sup>121</sup> Jacky Bratton, 'Beating the Bounds: Gender Play and Role Reversal in the Edwardian Music Hall', in *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage*, ed. Michael Booth and Joel Kaplan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 109. Bratton argues that representations of disorderly women and androgynes made space to contest and add to the debate on the position of women against the background of the women's suffrage activism. There was a tradition of performers cross dressing both male to female and female to male.

<sup>122</sup> Russell, 'Varieties of Life', 78.

<sup>123</sup> Barry. J. Faulk, *Music Hall & Modernity: The Late-Victorian Discovery of Popular Culture* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004), 13.

<sup>124</sup> Vicinus, *Industrial Muse*, 258.

<sup>125</sup> Bailey, 'Custom, Capital, Culture', 197; Bennett, 'Music in Halls', 6–9.

<sup>126</sup> Bratton, *Victorian Ballad*, 157.

the songs.<sup>127</sup> In order to gain attention in the melee of audience activity, the solo singer would be both shouting and singing with winks and gestures, and a ‘jerk (of the body) at the beginning of each line, in true street style.’<sup>128</sup> The music-hall’s evening entertainment would be announced by a chairman in formal wear who would introduce acts, cover for missing acts by singing, dodge missiles thrown by the audience and generally be subjected to mockery.<sup>129</sup>

In his analysis of the relationship between music-hall artist and audience, Peter Bailey describes how performers would *ad-lib* and patter out of character as themselves between verses of singing in character.<sup>130</sup> They could skilfully manipulate the audience firstly to respond to the character they were performing, but then also to the intimacy of a more direct communication with the artist themselves. Bailey explains how the audience was thereby included, seeing the ‘joins in the performance’ and getting a sense of being an active participant in that performance. This sense of moving the boundaries, removing the fourth wall, he calls ‘knowingness’. Knowingness is the basis of the humour, as the audience participates with heckling, cheering, booing, and joining in choruses.<sup>131</sup>

The theory of knowingness can be expanded to the Yiddish music hall because there are more layers. Most obviously there is the shared immigrant experience. But in addition, there were degrees of insider knowledge of England, as waves of new immigrants ceased being ‘greeners’ and became more acculturated, and newer immigrants took their place. Using anglicisms in song texts was a way of identifying where one was on this scale. If you understood the anglicisms you were more acculturated. If you understood the London references you were more ‘londonised’.<sup>132</sup> In another vein, further accentuating ‘knowingness’, performers and audience in the Yiddish halls were

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<sup>127</sup> Bailey, ‘Custom, Capital, Culture’, 201.

<sup>128</sup> Blanchard Jerrold, *London: A Pilgrimage* (London, 1872; repr. New York, 1970), 167. Quoted in Bailey, ‘Conspiracies’, 143.

<sup>129</sup> Vicinus, *Industrial Muse*, 252. The chairman could also be bribed to produce lengthier or nicer introductions.

<sup>130</sup> Bailey’s research on ‘knowingness’ has been held in high regard by scholars. See in particular Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 223; Russell, *Popular Music*, 153; Russell, ‘Varieties of Life’, 75; Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism*, 23–4.

<sup>131</sup> Bailey, ‘Conspiracies’, 161.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Londonised’ is my term. In a talk on London jokes in the Eighteenth Century, Simon Jarrett described how the use of London slang identified who were the ‘assimilated Londoners’, creating an ‘in-group’ and a larger ‘out-group’ of newcomers. Simon Jarrett, ‘A Welshman Coming to London, and Seeing a Jackanapes...’ (Conference, London and the Nation, Birkbeck, University of London, 10 July 2015).

a small immigrant community. People knew each other, shared the same streets and markets, cafes and synagogues. The theatres and music halls were in the middle of housing areas and shopping thoroughfares where both performers and audience lived. The relationship was therefore already an intimate one.

An example of 'knowingness' can be seen in the experience of Joseph Markovitsh. Markovitsh describes coming to London as a penniless young professional singer around 1900 and searching for the Yiddish theatre. He finds the York Minster music hall: 'a three cornered room, a few hard wooden benches, a piano, a stage a yard and a half wide and three quarters of a yard deep.' Markovitsh impresses the management with his singing and his ability to write songs and is hired on the spot. However, he is unimpressed by the out of tune piano and the vulgarity of the pianist who seems to treat life as an opportunity for crude music-hall humour comparing his wife to the badly tuned piano. In response to why he only plays with one hand, the pianist replies: 'I keep my left hand in my pocket so nobody should steal my two pennies.' Markovitsh, used to being treated more elegantly as he toured across Russia singing classical and liturgical repertoire, was taken aback by such coarseness and the rough environment.<sup>133</sup>

In his first performance on the York Minster music-hall stage Markovitsh sung a Russian soldier's song. This was followed by a man whistling, a sketch, a dancer, a range of *double entendre* and comic songs, and ending with an actor singing a carol.<sup>134</sup> Markovitsh, inspired by the music-hall experience that he had never seen before, wrote the song *A kholem* (A Dream). The dream imagined coming to London and being warmly welcomed by Rothschild, driven in carriages and being given rich food. In the chorus he wakes up to the reality of poverty in London's East End:

*Oy a kholem, a tayerer a giter  
ober in der fri iz oyfn hartsn zeyer biter,  
azelkhe khaloymes nit far aykh gedakht,  
kholemen zikh mir ale nakht!*

Ah a dream, a dear and lovely dream  
But in the morning my heart is bitter  
Such dreams should not happen to you  
That's what I dream every night!<sup>135</sup>

Markovitsh performed this new song the next evening to a packed hall, where the audience:

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<sup>133</sup> Markovitsh, '50 yor'. *JS*, 20 November 1953, 2.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 November 1953, 2.

<sup>135</sup> Markovitsh, 'A kholem', *Ibid.*, 4 December, 1953.

wouldn't let me leave the stage and people started throwing pennies and one or two sixpences as well. I had to sing the refrain until the whole audience sang along with me, 'A dream, a dear and lovely dream, but in the morning my heart was bitter'. Well the dream gave me a fortune! When all the pennies were counted up it came to four shillings and three sixpences. I protested... so they explained to me that the audience was showing their appreciation and I should be grateful. And if they whistle, they aren't whistling you off the stage, it's is also to your credit.<sup>136</sup>

The song was so popular, Markovitsh performed it night after night. This popularity would certainly have been due to shared experience of the sentiment and the developing relationship between performer and audience. Markovitsh was thrown into the unruly world of the Yiddish music hall, and his description of the ramshackle and informal nature of the Yiddish music hall is backed up by later reviews. A Gentile English visitor to the York Minster hall in 1902 describes a noisy and demonstrative, but well-dressed Jewish audience of over four hundred people in a crowded shabby room. He lists the songs: a comedian singing a popular comic song, serious and semi-religious songs and a couple of English songs. In the second half there is a sketch of Russian Jewish life, with a rabbi made to look like a buffoon and 'a little love-making and a little domestic trickery thrown in.' The anonymous reviewer concludes his article with the assertion:

Nothing appeals so strongly to their feelings and sensibilities as those reminiscences of the continental Jewries where their earliest years were spent, and which they find so effectively reproduced in the Yiddish music-hall.<sup>137</sup>

The *Standard's* reviewer was certainly intrigued by the ethnic quality of the Yiddish music hall, and the stylish Jewish youth who were dressing in 'Oxford Street' clothes of the latest style. He was also amused by the Yiddish-accented English words as the audience joined in the chorus of an English song. The reviewer notices how acculturation to British norms combines with maintaining a specifically Yiddish culture.

London Yiddish theatre reviewer Leib Kreditor felt that this Yiddish culture did not need any English addition, that it survived in a bubble of Yiddish, so much so that the Anglo-Jewish establishment were terrified that the 'whole English Jewish community would be Yiddishised.'<sup>138</sup> And yet the Yiddish writers were very influenced by their

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 4 December 1953, 2.

<sup>137</sup> 'A Music-Hall in the East End', *The Standard* 28 October 1902. This review was re-printed the same week in the *Jewish Chronicle*, with the comment that it was a 'somewhat unsympathetic' portrayal. 'A Yiddish Music-Hall in the East End', *JC*, 31 October 1902.

<sup>138</sup> Kreditor, 'Yidish teatr in london', 14.

parallel English worlds around them, and were keen to be a part of that world too. Chance Newton assessed the ‘extraordinary’ mixture of cultures at the Wonderland Yiddish music hall on Whitechapel Road in 1902:

They include little plays, songs and sketches, given first in Yiddish dialect and afterwards translated into more or less choice English by, as a rule, a Hebraic interpreter. This interpreter often improves the occasion by calling the attention of kind – and mostly alien – friends in front to certain side shows consisting of all sorts of armless, legless, skeleton, or spotted ‘freaks’ scattered around the recesses of this galleryless hall. When once the ‘freaks’ have been examined, or the ‘greeners’ and other foreign and East-End ‘sweated’ Jew toilers have utilised the interval to indulge in a little light refreshment according to their respective tastes, the Yiddish sketches and songs – comic and otherwise – are resumed until ‘closing time’.<sup>139</sup>

Already in 1902 the songs and sketches were being translated for children of immigrants losing their Yiddish, for earlier Jewish immigrants or for English audience members. In 1907 there was a review of the Princess Yiddish music Hall in the *Jewish Chronicle*. Here again the cultural mixture is highlighted. The atmosphere was described as a ‘thoroughly free-and-easy, go-as-you-please unconventional affair.’ The *Jewish Chronicle* correspondent listed a programme that was seemingly a conventional mix of music-hall turns you would see in any English music hall, yet wrote of what he saw as intrinsically Jewish:

To the superficial it was the ordinary music-hall programme – songs, sketch, biograph and so forth, but in reality it was... a programme steeped in the Ghetto, so to speak. It was not merely that the peculiar humour of the Jew dominated its comic songs. But the atmosphere of the Ghetto was there the tailors shop, the immigrants, the shrewd exploiters of the immigrants, the “golus” [exile], and even the more pious side of Israell’ish aspirations. It was the life of a Jew set in a Gentile framework.<sup>140</sup>

Both the *Standard* reviewer and Chance Newton describe the tension between the immigrants’ old world and England. This was portrayed by the English-influenced content of the Yiddish music hall. This is further illustrated by the *Jewish Chronicle* reviewer recounting a performance of the song ‘The Old Bull and Bush’: ‘quaintly adapted to some sulphurous lines about the Russian tyranny.’<sup>141</sup> To both English writers this tension or balance was a point of importance.

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<sup>139</sup> Henry Chance Newton, ‘Music-Hall London’, in *Living London; Its Work and Its Play, Its Humour and Its Pathos, Its Sights and Its Scenes*, ed. George Sims (New York & Melbourne: Cassell and Company, limited, 1902), 225.

<sup>140</sup> ‘A Visit to the Yiddish Music Hall’, *JC*, 8 February 1907.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

Markovitsh's memoir does not mention the use of the Yiddish music hall as a site of acculturation. Of greater importance to him was to make a living, which was done by writing material that the Jewish immigrant audience would relate to and be entertained by. Yet, although Markovitsh had landed in the music hall, he always had an eye on creating and performing more serious material. Arn Nager, on the other hand, was solely writing popular songs for the masses: coarse, edgy and funny narratives of stolen husbands and wives, vulgar costers and young men behaving badly.

### ***Opposition to the music halls***

Music-halls had to balance competing demands. On one hand profit-driven music hall proprietors were eager to maximise income from the huge popularity of the halls. On the other hand the authorities and reformers wanted to regulate working class thought and behaviour. Both demands had a significant effect on the content of the songs.<sup>142</sup>

From 1889 the control of music halls was under the authority of the newly established London County Council (LCC). The LCC would only inspect music halls in response to complaints from the public. An LCC inspection could result in demands for building repairs or changes to performance material. The LCC could ultimately revoke the music-hall license. The music hall proprietors had to maintain the precarious balance between giving the audience the entertainment they desired and ensuring that the authorities were kept happy. There was no official censorship of performance material, so music-hall management did their utmost to forestall complaints that would elicit an inspection by having a form of self-censorship. Some halls would invite audiences to report any improprieties to them directly, bypassing the LCC, avoiding state intervention and continuing the 'illusion' that the proprietors had some control over their music halls. In effect music-hall proprietors did their own policing.<sup>143</sup>

The music hall proprietors therefore needed to maintain a status quo, but not lose the edge that gave the music hall its attraction. This coincided with a change in public taste that preferred innuendo to open vulgarity.<sup>144</sup> Bratton sees this as a trigger for greater creativity in Victorian verse that led to a new and 'lively tradition' and better poetry,

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<sup>142</sup> Summerfield, 'Effingham Arms', 209.

<sup>143</sup> The expense of buildings repairs could be prohibitive for small halls, which could force them to close. Pennybacker, 'Not What She Said', 127–8.

<sup>144</sup> Kift, *Victorian Music Hall*, 169.

forcing writers to find novel ways of saying things obliquely.<sup>145</sup> However, the fear that complaints about song content would result in an inspection, led to proprietors encouraging 'safe' subjects. David Russell argues that the prevalence of songs about war and soldiers was due to the fact that a patriotic and heroic depiction of war was respectable and carried few risks.<sup>146</sup> Proprietors were often particularly concerned about the performers' patter and off-the-cuff comments that they could not control. Some managements brought in contracts and had rules designed to limit talking to the audience, forbid vulgar language and offensive allusions to official figures and institutions.<sup>147</sup> Other house rules had clauses demanding song scripts be submitted to management for approval a week prior to performance.<sup>148</sup> One music hall dismissed artists or docked a week's wages for using vulgarities or *double-entendres* on stage, and another hall forbade any direct reference to 'political, religious or local matters'.<sup>149</sup> Some proprietors went as far as fining artists for bad behaviour off-stage, such as lack of punctuality and sobriety.<sup>150</sup>

The LCC were themselves under pressure from the reformers. Middle-class reformers were unhappy at the amount of drink consumed in the music halls and the presence of prostitutes, leading to drunken and lewd behaviour. They felt that this was encouraged by the lack of formality, areas without seating where men could meet prostitutes and men and women could freely talk and socialise. They felt that rowdy audience behaviour was encouraged by the suggestive song lyrics and gestures, and the presence of prostitutes in the audience accentuated the sexual atmosphere.<sup>151</sup> Reformers demanded an auditorium where the audience were seated and well behaved.<sup>152</sup> They also

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<sup>145</sup> Bratton, *Victorian Ballad*, 156. Bratton argues that a spin-off from talking about sexual matters less openly meant that people became inhibited, and the humour generated in the songs then helped people overcome their embarrassment and shyness.

<sup>146</sup> Dave Russell, 'We Carved Our Way to Glory': The British Soldier in Music Hall Song and Sketch, c. 1880-1914', in *Popular Imperialism and the Military 1850-1950*, ed. John MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 53.

<sup>147</sup> Bailey, 'Custom, Capital, Culture', 196.

<sup>148</sup> Summerfield, 'Effingham Arms', 224.

<sup>149</sup> Papers of the Select Committee on Theatres and Places of Entertainment (HC 1892 (240), 440-2). Quoted in Pennybacker, 'Not What She Said', 129.

<sup>150</sup> Kift, *Victorian Music Hall*, 168.

<sup>151</sup> Bailey, 'Conspiracies', 161.

<sup>152</sup> The campaign against alcohol licensing and prostitution centred on the West End halls. The temperance reformer Ormison Chant saw a link between prostitution and the promenading of the audience, so campaigned to remove areas for promenade and ban alcohol from the auditorium. Summerfield, 'Effingham Arms', 219.



attempted to get a foothold by joining the LCC which was dominated by 'progressives'.<sup>153</sup>

LCC policy on music halls was inconsistent. In response to some complaints about sexual allusions in lyrics, the offending material would simply be removed, but similar complaints may be ignored if they felt there were aesthetic qualities to the songs. Some complaints were made on material that was not very daring, and other material would be ignored because on the page it did not show the suggestive nature that a nod or a wink could create in performance.<sup>154</sup>

Music halls were popular for their escapism. Far from challenging the status quo, songs reflected a conservative acceptance of the working person's place in society, accepted the norm of class divisions. And the link between the halls and Toryism was cemented by the Tory drink trade.<sup>155</sup> The songs tended to accept the working class position and did not offer any escape route or alternative futures.<sup>156</sup> Although deeply conservative places of entertainment, Russell suggests that there were spaces where subversive material could creep in with the celebration of cerebral and physical pleasures that challenged respectability.<sup>157</sup> However, Senelick argues that the songs 'avoided or distorted the true concerns of the working class' to such an extent that they could be deemed propaganda against the working class. They depicted working class people as vulgar and superficial, and the content of the songs did not touch their real struggles.<sup>158</sup> Although the English music hall songs may not give a simple reflection of working class culture they do give an insight into contemporary attitudes.<sup>159</sup> The songs therefore cannot be taken at face value, and it is more productive to tease out the elements of contemporary experience and ideas that their lyrics convey.

Despite the reformers and the LCC inspections, attempts at moral improvement were not successful. By Edwardian times it was clear that middle class evangelists had failed,

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<sup>153</sup> Kift, *Victorian Music Hall*, 162. The relationship between the reformers, the abstinence movement, campaigners against female exploitation and the LCC has been researched in detail by Ibid., 155–185; Pennybacker, 'Not What She Said', 135–7.

<sup>154</sup> Pennybacker, 'Not What She Said', 128, 130–5.

<sup>155</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Working Class Culture', 494–5.

<sup>156</sup> Bailey, 'Custom, Capital, Culture', 198.

<sup>157</sup> Russell, 'Varieties of Life', 74.

<sup>158</sup> Senelick, 'Politics as Entertainment', 150.

<sup>159</sup> Russell, 'Carved Our Way', 53.

and the working class in London were not ‘Christian, provident, chaste or temperate’.<sup>160</sup> The reformers had failed with the music hall, but so had the socialists and trade unionists failed to encourage the working class to organise, and less working people were going to lectures or ‘rational recreation’ activities.

It is hard to ascertain how much self-censorship applied to the Yiddish material in the Yiddish halls. Were Yiddish songs able to slip through and ‘get away with’ edgy and political material because it was in an unintelligible language to the London County Council? Or was there as strong a self-censorship from within the Jewish community, with pressure on one side from the religious and on the other from the intellectuals and radicals?

The debate about quality in the Yiddish theatre and music hall was argued in the pages of the London Jewish press. The critique of *shund* tends to focus on theatre, with music hall being the most vulgar example where coarse lyrics and sexual innuendo were commonplace and generally divorced from any narrative context. Writing about music halls in America, Nina Warnke analyses the media war against the American Yiddish music halls in 1902–3. Warnke writes how socialists and intellectuals attempted to change audience behaviour and shut down the American Yiddish music halls. They berated the sale of alcohol, prostitutes in the audience and vulgar material as morally dangerous to Jewish society.<sup>161</sup> Although significantly smaller in scale, the battles in London were fiercely fought in the pages of the *Idisher ekspres* with articles demanding changes to the Anglo-Yiddish popular theatre and music hall. In December 1901 a furious indictment of the London Yiddish stage and the *shund* it performed was published under the alias ‘Eyner vos iz dort geven’ (One who was there). The article began by berating the posters outside the Pavilion theatre of a man dressed as a woman striking different poses. He used this image as an example of the appalling state of the London Yiddish stage with its ‘unnatural clumsy pantomime’, where the genre is impossible to deduce and the melodramatic and un-naturalistic acting style is simply embarrassing:

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<sup>160</sup> Stedman Jones, ‘Working Class Culture’, 471.

<sup>161</sup> Warnke, ‘Popular Culture’, 321–31. For American vaudeville, also see Nahshon, *New York’s Yiddish Theater*, 240–55.

This is speech with a tone that was developed in the Yiddish theatre, the tone and the sort of speech of the Purim clown and the Purim-shpilers. Yes this is our old, well-known Mondrish who has come back in another form. He doesn't come to us on Purim any more for a few minutes, to grab a tote of brandy and a few coins and go away, Here is Mondrish under another name who lets his picture be printed on huge posters and invites you to come to him instead of him to you.<sup>162</sup>

The comparison of a sketch to a *purimshpil* and actors to Mondrish, the Purim clown, was derogatory. The *purimshpil* was a tradition of plays performed on the one-day festival of Purim when the religious commandment was to get drunk until one cannot tell the difference between the villain and the hero of the Purim story.<sup>163</sup> The custom began in Eastern Europe where Purim players would walk from house to house performing sketches and singing songs in a buffoonery style. Ahuva Belkin describes the *purimshpil* material as: 'Absorbed into popular humour, the language is totally unrestrained, containing indecencies and obscenities, insults, curses, and blasphemies.'<sup>164</sup> The language of the *purimshpil* quoted by Belkin is, on the surface, more vulgar than the songs of the Yiddish music hall, however the music-hall songs also conveyed oblique messages which were of similar ilk.

A follow-on article appeared in the *Idisher ekspres* five months later, this time focusing on the repertoire and the audience. This article decried the corruption of the Yiddish theatre repertoire that offered 'crude music-hall jokes, with vulgar songs that did not have anything to do with the contents.' The article argued that the unquestionable *shund* of the music-hall comedy had now become the standard fare of the Yiddish stage:

In every theatre one is happy to play to the gallery and throw out a comic role but this is nothing but an add-on. In the Yiddish theatre this add-on has become the main thing, the comic role takes over the main role, and one sees that the management is more concerned with the taste of the gallery than the intelligent audience in the good seats. This is for business, but not for art.<sup>165</sup>

Yet the 'taste of the gallery' was important, and the highbrow critics could not see past the exterior of popular culture texts. Far from being merely the *shund* that these critics derided, songs and sketches engaged with a wide variety of ideas. It is true that some were silly, some vulgar, but many were deeply meaningful interventions into important parts of immigrant life. The battle against *shund*, however, did not disappear, indeed it

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<sup>162</sup> Eyner Vos iz Dort Geveyn, 'Der idisher teatr'. *IE*, 25 December 1901.

<sup>163</sup> Talmud, tractate Megillah (7b)

<sup>164</sup> Ahuva Belkin, 'The "Low" Culture of the Purimshpil', in *New Approaches*, ed. Berkowitz, 2003, 29.

<sup>165</sup> Eyner Vos iz Dort Geveyn, 'Der idisher teatr', *IE*, 7 May 1902.

intensified with further waves of immigration bringing more educated and political writers and audiences.

### **Part 3: 1904-1914**

In 1904, the Russo-Japanese war prompted thousands of young men to escape conscription to the Tsar's army by emigrating to Western Europe. A year later, during and after the abortive 1905 revolution, thousands of Jewish revolutionaries streamed into Western Europe. Although the 1905 Aliens Act restricted immigration into Britain it was not strictly enforced and, with a new wave of pogroms in 1906, it was further relaxed. Many of those entering Britain were educated Russian immigrants who had been a part of the development of the Jewish Labour *Bund*. The *Bund* had set up cultural programmes in Russia with lectures, poetry and the arts, and gave Yiddish a new status as an appropriate language for high art. Both the *intelligentsia* and the workers who made up the *Bund* had had access to a significant amount of high-brow Yiddish culture. After 1905 there was therefore a willing audience in London for a more serious Yiddish culture.

Yiddish poetry had developed since the early labour poets. Although the *Bund* still used socialist anthems from the proletarian poets, newer poets had a larger pool of inspiration to draw on from Yiddish literature. In particular were a group of immigrant poets to New York who termed themselves *Di yunge* (The Young). They eschewed writing politics as poetry, derogatorily terming socialist verse the 'rhyming department of the Jewish labor movement'. They wanted to write poetry for poetry's sake. They wanted to engage with the aesthetics of reality, mood and mystery, considering small experiences and sensibility rather than national politics. In 1907 they set up the journal *Di yugend* (The Youth) for publishing their poetry.<sup>166</sup> This expansion in cultural horizons fed into the ongoing debate about quality in Yiddish culture.

In London the daily *Idisher zhurnal* appeared in 1905 as a more high brow paper. Poetry was still published regularly in the *Idisher ekspres* as well as in the satirical *Fonograf* which appeared in 1908. One new journal, important to this thesis, was the satirical magazine the *Blofer*, published monthly between 1911 and 1913. The *Blofer*

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<sup>166</sup> Irving Howe, Ruth. R. Wisse, and Khone Shmeruk, *The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse* (New York: Viking, 1987), 28.

endlessly lampooned antics at the Yiddish theatre, much of it in verse. The *Blofer* did not restrict itself to the Yiddish theatre. The major target of the satire was ‘hypocrisy’ and no-one was exempt. The *Blofer* targeted Anglo-Jews, orthodox immigrants and radicals.

The co-editor of the *Blofer* was Dr Avrom Margolin, who wrote under the pen name of Avreml. He was a well-known contributor to New York’s satirical journals *Der groyser kundes* and *Der kibitzer* and to the first issues of the *Blofer*. In 1911 he was brought over to London (probably from Berlin) amid fanfare, and was welcomed with excitement on the front cover of the *Blofer* issue no. 6. In the front page satirical cartoon, Avreml is seen floating over the English Channel on a copy of the *Blofer* with a crowd of well-dressed anglicised immigrant Jews with suits and hats waiting on the shore to greet him. The sun is rising to reveal the name and address of the publisher Moyshe Zusman of 90 New Road, Whitechapel. Avreml became a prolific poet of topical satire in London writing extensively in each issue of the *Blofer* between 1911 and 1913. He also wrote poetry regularly for the *Idisher ekspres* in 1912, and for journalist Morris Mayer’s new daily paper the *Tsayt* (Times) in 1913-14. Margolin’s co-editor was the theatre critic Leon Kusman, who wrote under the pen name of L. Izraeli in the *Idisher ekspres*. Based on his own experience, novelist Joseph Brenner’s 1909 novel *Min Ha-Meitzar* vividly portrays a printing house in Whitechapel, with its tensions and conflicts over ideology. The news editor tirelessly puts the paper together whilst dreaming of ‘writing a searing tragedy drawn from the life of emigrants, revolutionaries and members of the self-defence units, and presenting it in the local Yiddish theatre’.<sup>167</sup>

Mayer recalls the big revival in London of both the Yiddish press and the Yiddish theatre. He describes how in 1906 there were two Yiddish theatre troupes. One troupe was based at the Pavilion theatre playing mainly operettas and melodramas.<sup>168</sup> The Pavilion Theatre, a large Victorian theatre, with stage machinery equivalent to the West End, was used to putting on English melodramas and pantomime. On one of the main East End thoroughfares its huge billboards advertised Yiddish operettas and melodramas with the names of famous Yiddish stars alluring the audience to popular entertainment. There were resident companies which would ship in actor-manager stars

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<sup>167</sup> Brenner, *Out of the Depths*, 353–448.

<sup>168</sup> Mayer, *Yidish teatr in london*, 31.

from America, who would use their own repertoire and direct the actors.<sup>169</sup> The second troupe performed at the Standard theatre playing mainly dramas and life-stories by Gordin and other playwrights concerned with realism.

The debate about high and low art was intensifying. Intellectuals wanted more realistic theatre, and activists were still attempting to move audiences out of the music halls and commercial theatre into more serious art. Even the *Jewish Chronicle* participated in the debate on the occasion of a new Yiddish music hall opening in 1909. In an article suggesting that finding a ‘Yiddish Robey’ should not be deterred, it warns:

If his jokes are fresh and his “patter” lightsome, then the Yiddish music-hall stage has cause for congratulation. Otherwise it were far better to keep his “light” hidden from the gaze of men.<sup>170</sup>

This suggests that there was a fondness for the music-hall genre, but there were demands for quality control between good and bad popular culture. This was a distinction not held by most Yiddish critics. Leon Kusman condemns all popular theatre and gives an example of how actors encourage audience participation, which he sees as a slippery slope. In an article condemning the lack of artistic merit in Yiddish plays, Kusman, under his pen-name L. Izraeli, described a performance of a popular song in a play by the Yiddish dramatist Rakov:

When Motl Noz (Mr Shilling) sang *shuldig iz di noz* [The Nose is Guilty] he was soon helped by the gallery, after that by the circle and the porter and then the whole theatre sang with him just like, *lehavdil, yomkipper at kol-nidre* in synagogue.<sup>171</sup>

Kusman saw this atmosphere as an integral part of popular entertainment where Rakov was writing popular songs for the gallery and creating *shund* rather than aspiring towards high art. Intriguingly, he makes a comparison between the atmosphere in Yiddish popular culture and that created on the holiest day of the year in synagogue. The word *lehavdil* denotes the unsuitability of the comparison, however it does suggest that creating atmosphere was an intrinsic part of Yiddish cultural life, both in religious observance and popular culture. Indeed, on Yom Kippur most Jews would be in synagogue, even if they did not attend regularly every Sabbath, and the solemnity of the atmosphere would be created by singing together. The comparison, however, could also be seen as a rather mischievous jibe implying that on Yom Kippur the singing crowds

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<sup>169</sup> Such as Sigmund Feinman, Maurice Moscovitch, Joseph Kessler and Fanny Waxman. Mazower, *Yiddish Theatre*, 17.

<sup>170</sup> ‘From the East End’, *JC*, 6 August 1909, 20. George Robey was one of the most famous English music-hall stars this time.

<sup>171</sup> L. Izraeli, ‘Repertuar fun idishn teatr’, *IE*, 21 February 1912.

of nominally religious people, more often seen in the Yiddish music hall, made the synagogue as un-holy a place as the popular theatre.

Over the next few years an idea was proposed to build a new purpose-built Yiddish theatre in the East End for the staging of operas and serious drama. A Yiddish journalist known only by Kh. T suggested that London's popular theatre has had its day: 'Every theatre visitor now knows the difference between an artist and a *purim shpiler*... and there is no place any more for such uproar in London,'<sup>172</sup> In 1912 The *Faynmans idishe folks teater* (Feinman's Yiddish People's Theatre) or 'Temple of Art' opened in Commercial Rd with money raised from East End immigrants. Its announcement in *Der Idisher zhurnal* underlined how this was quality theatre by demanding quiet respectful and appropriate behaviour from the audience: 'Please do not forget that the Yiddish People's Theatre is a temple and make sure that an atmosphere of holiness prevails'.<sup>173</sup> The performance of *Rigoletto* in Yiddish even brought superlatives from the *Jewish Chronicle*.<sup>174</sup>

However, in the height of its success, the Yiddish People's Theatre incurred conflict. The *Idisher ekspres* letters pages debated the appropriateness of opening on the Sabbath: the religious shareholders stating that it was against Jewish law, and the secular shareholders claiming that it was unfair for the religious to set the limits. The wrath of the religious about performances on the Sabbath, and the high cost of tickets (with no gallery of cheaper seats) meant that locals did not go.<sup>175</sup> With inadequate financial backing, after only four months, the Yiddish People's Theatre closed. London was simply unable to contain two theatres. So what survived was the Pavilion theatre which gave home to all, both the popular theatre, that the East End fans flocked to, and a smaller amount of more serious Yiddish theatre.<sup>176</sup>

The developments and subsequent failure of the Feinman's People's Theatre was closely followed by the satirists in the *Blofer*. They mercilessly ribbed the actors, the

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<sup>172</sup> Kh. T. 'Di idishe bine in london', *IE*, 9 July 1913, 4.

<sup>173</sup> 'A Word to the Public' *Idisher zhurnal* 14 March 1912. Reprinted in Mazower, *Yiddish Theatre*, 70.

The article asks the audience to behave well, quietly, only applause at appropriate times, not to whistle, eat, ladies should take off hats, and no children under 8 years old.

<sup>174</sup> 'brilliant talent... one of the most notable operatic triumphs in this country... the most highly trained singers and musicians... with an accuracy, a precision, and a perfect mastery, astonishing in its excellence.' 'Rigoletto in Yiddish: A Notable Triumph', *JC*, 19 April 1912, 32-3.

<sup>175</sup> *IE*, 17 and 24 April 1912, 2.

<sup>176</sup> L. Izraeli, 'Di pavilyen: ir repertuar un personel' *IE*, 28 February 1912, 2.

managers, the writers, and maybe most of all, the ordinary *moyshe*, the bum on the seat of the popular theatre and music hall. All of them were blamed for the failure of the high art Yiddish theatre. Kusman despaired of the Yiddish theatre repertoire that ‘sinks with every day to the abyss of trash, comic dance, song and cheap jokes.’ Yet he had to admit that that was what Yiddish theatre audiences preferred.<sup>177</sup>

## Conclusion

The three decades between 1884 and the start of the First World War saw Anglo-Yiddish culture develop and flourish. Although its progress was halting, the Yiddish press, political poetry, theatre and music hall concentrating on the Anglo-immigrant experience was present in London’s East End.

The writers of Anglo-Yiddish songs and poetry came from diverse backgrounds, with influences of Jewish and Russian educations, of oppositional politics of Eastern Europe. They came into a London that was full of new influences from English culture and old debates around Yiddish culture. The Yiddish radical press and the Yiddish theatre and the conflicts they brought up raised questions that were not to be easily resolved. The differences were too great. Attitudes to modernity and quality, political allegiances, religious observance, and processes of acculturation did not make for any unified thinking. The attempt by the Anglo-Jewish community and even the Jewish socialists to edify was not successful across the board. Rather than going to serious theatre or reading translation of the classics into Yiddish, the younger immigrants would be more likely to be parading down Whitechapel road in all the finery they could muster, spending their hard-earned money taking their sweethearts to the Yiddish music hall. Yet this diversity made for a vibrant Anglo-Yiddish popular culture.

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<sup>177</sup> Izraeli, ‘Repertuar’; Leon Kusman, ‘Faynman –yidish folks teatr (batrakhtungn vegn ‘templ’)’, *IE*, 26 June 1912, 2,



### Chapter 3: The Transnational in Anglo-Yiddish Popular Culture

The Anglo-Yiddish cultural texts described in this thesis are not a simple reflection of the lived life of the immigrants. Instead they comment on and analyse the immigrant experience from different perspectives. Through selective emphasis, parody and satire, they transform immigrant life into a crafted artefact for entertainment or in pursuit of an emotional or political response. However, although the Anglo-Yiddish cultural texts may not reflect details of lived life, entwined in the lyric is a reflection of the cultural mix of a changing landscape of experiences and locations. The cultural transmission within the songs and poems is a patchwork of ideas and themes that derive from multiple sources, set within a culture that is diverse and changing. Written into, sometimes hidden inside, the words, the phraseology, the concepts, there are details and particularities that straddle places and cultures that had become the changing world of the Jewish immigrant. Texts about general and often universal experiences such as working for a living, fighting for a better future or developing intimate relationships are overlaid with multiple cultural markers showing the layered intensity of the transnational immigrant experience even in some of the most seemingly straightforward texts. This does not create a simple picture that is easily analysed. Ethnomusicologist Lisa Lowe uses the term ‘messy’ to describe the lack of uniformity in Asian American poetry and fiction. She particularly draws attention to the ‘wide spectrum of articulation’ which ranges from the use of characteristic ethnic attributes to a refusal to see culture as singularly defined. Instead the writers choose articulations ‘which celebrate ethnicity as a fluctuating composition of differences, intersections, and incommensurabilities’.<sup>1</sup>

The immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe westward did not only entail a uni-directional relationship between the *heyim* (home country) and the new place of settlement. The immigrant experience inhabited multiple locations and cultures, and these appear in the poetry and song layered upon each other, contributing to a transnational ‘network of networks’.<sup>2</sup> These networks include not only different sections of the English milieu, but also the relationship between Yiddish-speaking Jewish communities across the Yiddish-speaking world. It is possible to consider five major cultural milieux that impacted on and influenced the Yiddish speaking immigrant in

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<sup>1</sup> Lowe, ‘Heterogeneity, Hybridity’, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Schiller and Meinhof, ‘Singing New Song’, 25.

England: the *heyim* of Eastern Europe where they came from; the Yiddish-speaking community in the East End of London they came into; the Anglo-Jewish establishment; the English host community, and other Yiddish immigrant Diaspora communities particularly that of New York. These five locations are referenced implicitly or explicitly throughout the texts, yet the locations are, in themselves, heterogeneous and in the process of change, and the cultural artefacts that emanate from them are diverse.

Immigrants came from different areas of Yiddish-speaking Eastern Europe. Coming from the Pale of Settlement, Galicia, Ukraine or Poland meant differences in political realities, religious traditions and access to modernity and education. These differences in the *heyim* affected the landscape of the immigrant East End as people clustered in micro-communities in *landsmanshaftn*, organisations supporting people from the same home town, *khevres* of particular denominations, types of work and home towns or internationalist socialist groups. Migration brought a diminishing of the importance of religion, a fracturing of family structure and greater secularisation. Differences from the *heyim* were exposed and often exaggerated in the Yiddish-speaking East End, at times resulting in hard fought conflict within the immigrant community.

The Anglo-Jewish community impacted on the Eastern European community, with institutions, charities and organisations vying for influence over the whole community. Yet they too were a diverse society, with the *Jewish Chronicle* letters pages full of internal controversy and struggling with the lack of unity within the Anglo-Jewish community.<sup>3</sup> Although some aspects of Jewish culture were broad enough to be encompassed in a shared over-arching idea, there were no simple ways to divide and categorise a culture that had grown and developed from a range of diverse inputs, places and languages. So the Yiddish texts sometimes use broad strokes in their cultural mix, but more often have subtle subtexts. I argue that this entwined transnational cultural mix is ubiquitous in the Anglo-Yiddish texts, and is the engine behind the making of a vibrant and specific Anglo-Yiddish culture.

There may, at first glance, seem to be a paradox in my argument that the transnational mix makes a specifically *Anglo-Yiddish* popular culture. On one side the Yiddish texts are full of local allusion, language and concepts, debating ideas and events happening in

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<sup>3</sup> The *JC* in 1890 was particularly concerned with the issue of unity within the community. This will be considered further in the next chapter.

England. They exhibit a force for anglicisation despite the fact that they were written in Yiddish. Yet, at the same time, they also define, construct and maintain a specifically Jewish cultural feel in their allusions to shared religious texts and ideas, internal politics of the Yiddish-speaking world and a geography of Eastern Europe. This is partly supported by the fact that they were written in Yiddish. I argue that it is these contrary forces, clearly exhibited in the texts, that created a specifically Anglo-Yiddish popular culture. This does not mean to say that there are not huge similarities in experience with the New York Diaspora or with Eastern European Jewish life, large enough to be easily transferable in the texts. However, the extent of the use of ‘Englishness’ in the texts is too important to ignore, in its attempt to embed the Yiddish-speaking community into Britain.

Poets and songwriters made conscious decisions in their writing, and the layers of referencing to local and international, to specific and universal, to religious and secular can be both intentional and intuitive. Mark Slobin describes how musicians always keep multiple audiences in mind. They layer code upon code and switch between them ‘alternating what he called superculture and subculture’.<sup>4</sup> Martin Stokes argues that because subcultures ‘borrow’ from the dominant culture, they both ‘reflect’ and ‘invert’ the references to make a ‘quite different subversive whole’.<sup>5</sup> Both code-switching and inversion can be seen in the Yiddish texts as they engage with the complexity brought about by change.

Yiddish actors and singers had always inhabited a transnational world, visiting and performing wherever Jews migrated and lived. Troupes of *klezmerim* (musicians) travelled across Eastern Europe in search of work. As Yiddish Diasporas grew and transport developed, Yiddish actors travelled across the globe, including Western Europe, America, South Africa, Argentina, even the Far East. They performed in Yiddish theatres and carried the songs with them, songs with the transnational content and sentiment that all Yiddish-speaking Jews, immigrants or not, could relate to.<sup>6</sup> Every Eastern European Jew was affected by immigration, and the impact and influences went in multiple directions. The location of Yiddish theatre in key cities such as Odessa, Warsaw, Kiev, London, New York, Chicago, Toronto, Johannesburg or Buenos Aires

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<sup>4</sup> Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds*, 87–9.

<sup>5</sup> Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> For an introduction to the different centres of Yiddish theatre see Sandrow, *Vagabond*, 70–90.

can be seen as a part of the transnational network of what Kiwan and Meinhof call ‘*spatial hubs*’. Their research argues that artists are facilitated through a range of hubs. As well as places, they see ‘*human hubs*’ as individuals who are central to the transfer of transnational culture, like the artists themselves, who are known across networks. They also flag up the importance of ‘*institutional hubs*’ which are institutions set up to support migrant musicians.<sup>7</sup> In the case of the Jewish Diasporas, the Yiddish theatres themselves organised the cultural possibilities in their locations, but also *landsmanshaftn* were often central in the communication between different cultural centres.<sup>8</sup>

The politics of music and place in popular culture has been explored by George Lipsitz. In the book *Dangerous Crossroads* he describes how using place in song lyrics creates a bond with the audience through their memories that are tapped by the evocation of place. He argues that this can be positive or negative because ‘intentionally and unintentionally, musicians use lyrics, musical forms, and specific styles of performance that evoke attachment to or alienation from particular places.’<sup>9</sup> This chapter explores how the lyrics of the Yiddish texts, with their evocation of a variety of places, exemplifies the transnational and trans-cultural Yiddish *Ashkenaz*. It analyses the way the songs and poems blend cultural forms and language of the multi-aspects of the immigrant experience. It will consider a number of texts from different periods and perspectives in order to show how the variety of these trans-cultural mixes operate.

### ***Hashiveynu nazad: complex entanglements***

There are four texts that use a version of the words *hashiveynu nazad* in their title. There are three songs: ‘Der nayem hashiveynu nazad’ (The New *hashiveynu nazad*), ‘A firter hashiveynu nazad’ (A fourth *hashiveynu nazad*) and ‘A finfter hashiveynu nazad’ (A Fifth *hashiveynu nazad*). There is also a satirical poem just called ‘Hashiveynu nazad’. The texts are all specific to Jewish immigrant life in London, detailing places,

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<sup>7</sup> Kiwan and Meinhof, ‘Music and Migration’, 7–8.

<sup>8</sup> *Landsmanshaftn* supported transnational movement between America and Eastern Europe. See Soyer, ‘Transnationalism’, 202–5. Soyer focuses on support and does not include culture in his analysis. See also Ben Gidley’s argument of how *landsmanshaftn* in London supported associational politics and kept diasporic memory alive. Ben Gidley, ‘Diasporic Memory and the Call to Identity: Yiddish Migrants in Early Twentieth Century East London’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 6 (7 May 2013): 650–3.

<sup>9</sup> George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place* (New York: Verso, 1994), 4.

people and using anglicised language, yet they are all parodies of an original of the same title, and are all written in a meter to sing to the original melody.

The original 'Hashiveynu nazad' was a famous song by Abraham Goldfaden from his opera *Der yidisher faust*.<sup>10</sup> The title is unusual and not commonplace Yiddish, but a carefully crafted Yiddish hybrid. The word *hashiveynu* comes from a Hebrew word meaning 'return us'. It is a familiar term to synagogue-going Jews as it is part of the liturgy that is sung every Sabbath morning when the Torah scrolls are returned to the Ark. The word *hashiveynu* appears in the phrase *hashiveynu adonoy elekho venoshuvo, khadesh yomeynu kekedem*. The text translates as 'Return us to you God and we will return. Renew our days as of old'. The phrase comes from the Book of Lamentations, which is a lament for the destruction of Jerusalem and of a yearning for a utopia or a messianic era.<sup>11</sup> The Book of Lamentations may not have been familiar, only being read publicly once a year on the fast day of Tisha B'av. However, this phrase in the Sabbath morning liturgy is central, often sung where the word *hashiveynu* is emphasized and lingered on as the first word of the phrase. The familiarity of the liturgy gives the word *hashiveynu* intense and deep resonances. Goldfaden's choice to use such evocative language was in style with his operatic melodramas that used huge historical events with much emotive feeling to drive the action of his plays. The second word of the title *nazad* is also not standard Yiddish, and it comes from Russian meaning 'back there'. The title in full means 'return us back' or 'take us back'. The mixture of classical Hebrew and Russian reflected and augmented the content of the song.

Goldfaden's 'Hashiveynu nazad' has a Zionist message. The song describes the archetypal wandering Jew, living in exile through hardship, poverty, being uprooted, driven out of Spain and Russia and yearning for a home but not knowing which way to go. The answer offered by Goldfaden is *kayn tsien! hashiveynu nazad! To Zion! Take us back!*<sup>12</sup> The Zionist theme was strengthened by the use of biblical language giving

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<sup>10</sup> Goldfaden wrote musical operas from the 1870s to the early 1900s, although the date of *Der idisher faust* is unknown. Goldfaden, *Hashiveynu Nasad: Kehr Uns Zurik*, arranged by Kammen. New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1921; *Idishe bine*, 121–3.

<sup>11</sup> Lamentations 5:21. The poetry of the Book of Lamentations tells of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The book of Lamentations is recited in public once a year on the fast day of Tisha B'av, which commemorates the destruction of the Temples of Jerusalem.

<sup>12</sup> A verse from the original is re-printed in Rubin, *Voices of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong*, 374. There is also a recording. *Hashiveinu nazad*, performed by David Roitman (St. Petersburg: Musique Internationale, 1970?), LP.

depth and gravitas to the lyrics, and implying that going back to Zion included getting closer to God.

Any later song that would use the same title and melody as Goldfaden's hit song would carry resonances with it, and the audience of 'Der nayem hashiveynu nazad', a song about the hardship of immigration to London, would know both the Goldfaden song and the liturgy. Ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman writes how new text with political references was often put to known tunes creating symbolic associations between the old and new songs.<sup>13</sup> Thomas Turino calls the concept of using new words to an old song *creative indexing*. The familiar melodies *indexed* loyalties to the context of the original song.<sup>14</sup> It was very common for composers to write lyrics to known tunes, and the use of this method added colour to the new song through connotation, or at times emotional manipulation, which may have been a part of its use in the song 'Der nayem hashiveynu nazad'.

The song 'Der nayem hashiveynu nazad', not attributed to an author, is a song about immigration to England from Russia.<sup>15</sup> It describes the real cost of living in a 'free' country where the hopes of new immigrants are dashed by the reality of London's East End. The lyrics tell of leaving the hunger of Eastern Europe with the promise of a living wage in England, only to come up against seasonal work where the relief of having work during the busy season is offset by the starvation of the slack season. Workers skilled in the old country are left doing menial jobs in London. The song describes escaping Tsarist violence and tyranny, only to be beaten up on the streets of London for being an immigrant. The punch-line of each verse is the repeated *hashiveynu nazad* crying out to be taken back to Eastern Europe, suggesting that London is worse than Russia and it would be better to return.

The song uses the same image as Goldfaden's archetypal Jewish victim: lost, tired, dispirited, but transfers the geography from Russia, as the Diaspora of the longed for spiritual homeland of Zion, to a more pragmatic England being a Diaspora of Eastern Europe. This places a local song about London into a much broader context of the eternal Jewish condition.

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<sup>13</sup> Bohlman, *Music of Jewish Nationalism*, 55.

<sup>14</sup> Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 210.

<sup>15</sup> 'Der nayem hashiveynu nazad', SG. Reprinted in Shmeruk, 'Dray gasnlider'. 117–119. Also called 'Hashiveynu nazad' in *LK*, 156–7.

After establishing this universality in the first verse, the song is imbued with ‘local London colour’.<sup>16</sup> This can be seen most clearly in the final verse which walks through the markets of the East End:

<i>Git a blik in der leyn</i>	Glance down the Lane
<i>vet ir dort zen</i>	You’ll see there
<i>file mentshn shteyn</i>	Many people
<i>aropgelozt dem kop.</i>	With slumped heads.
<i>Tsvishn zey in dermit</i>	Amongst them
<i>in der korner goldston strit</i>	On the corner of Goulston Street
<i>shteyt a griner yid</i>	Stands a ‘greener’ Jew
<i>un kukt oys a dzob.</i>	Looking for a job.

Petticoat Lane and Goulston Street were so fundamental to East End life that the references would have been picked up by any immigrant, new or otherwise. The whole street name stays together as one unit, so *leyn* (lane) and *strit* (street) are used rather than the Yiddish *gesl* or *gas*. A second type of anglicism used in the song are words for which there is no equivalent in Yiddish, so in the third verse there is a reference to the *bizi tsayt* (busy season). These anglicisms evoke English working practices and the sweating system which uses the terminology ‘busy’ *bizi* and ‘slack’ *slek*. Yet a third type of anglicism simply uses English words as an aesthetic choice, such as the word *korner* in the verse quoted above. Further examples are in the second verse where the immigrant is wandering around London alone and confused and the lyric runs:

<i>A yoykel hot bald derkent</i>	A Yokel recognizes
<i>az a griner dort gayt</i>	That an ‘greener’ is walking by
<i>un hot oysgetsoygn zayne hent</i>	And stretched out his hands
<i>un hot im bavelkomt mit a fayt.</i> <sup>17</sup>	And welcomed him with a fight.

The lyric here uses the anglicisms *yoykel*, *bavelkomt* and *fayt*.<sup>18</sup> These anglicisms have perfectly good Yiddish alternatives, but the choice to use them makes an aesthetic point. Shmeruk suggested that anglicisms in songs about London were used ‘to be faithful and adequately reflect the style they are describing’.<sup>19</sup> The style in question is the Cockney-Yiddish that the immigrant community used in their daily lives in the East End of

<sup>16</sup> Shmeruk, ‘Dray gasnlider’, 116.

<sup>17</sup> Note the rhyme *fayt* and *gayt* is in the Polish-Yiddish dialect.

<sup>18</sup> The female form *yoykelte* is translated as a non-Jewish woman in the glossary of anglicisms in Arye-Meyer Kayzer. *Bay undz in vaytshepl: mayses un mayselekh*. Naroditski Press. London: 1944, 172.

<sup>19</sup> Shmeruk, ‘Dray gasnlider’, 115.

London, and the use of them in popular song builds a vibrant picture. It is a non-purist vernacular Yiddish used for its familiarity.

On a basic level 'Der nayem hashiveynu nazad' expresses discontent for life in England and suggests a better alternative, to return to Eastern Europe. Yet the chorus line is powerful and can be read with nostalgia, irony or satire. The title, '*der nayem* (the new) *hashiveynu nazad*' suggests that the song is saying something different and new. We are left to speculate. It could be a religious agenda with a nostalgic hankering back to the 'old country', the old faith, the family. It could be a *bundist* agenda satirizing the Goldfaden song, to say the answer is not Zion and is not England but staying and improving Eastern Europe. It could be a piece of designed Anglo-Jewish propaganda, discouraging migration to London.

By using the form of the Goldfaden chorus of 'Take Me Back', this song about London was placed within the context of a wider Yiddish nation. The songwriter could count on allusions to other parts of popular culture or politics being known, not only in an academic sense, but as ingrained implicit knowledge of Yiddish *Ashkenaz*. This text is transnational in the sense that it lays out the Yiddish world from Eastern Europe to the London Diaspora, and even includes the hidden reference to Zion. It portrays Jews as a people that are settling in new places but connected as a transnational group. This is not unusual, and may even be seen as commonplace to describe the Jews of one country as part of a nation. The important aspect here is how it was a part of *Anglo-Yiddish* popular culture: sold as a songsheet, reprinted in the *Londoner kupletist*. It did not travel to America and was not a version of an American immigrant Diaspora song. Acculturation to England is entangled with a sense of being the 'Jewish People'.

One must be careful, however, not to over-state the connection between a known song and new lyrics. Well-known songs were often used simply because the tune was known and it was easier and quicker than writing a new one. Or there may simply be a very light connection, as can be seen in the two songs 'A firter hashiveynu nazad' and 'A finfter hashiveynu nazad' published at around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> These

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<sup>20</sup> Yozef, 'A firter hashiveynu nazad', *LLM*, 14; Yozef, 'A finfter hashiveynu nazad', *SY*. These two songs are the only songsheets that could be found using the title 'Hashiveynu nazad', though in his lexicon of Yiddish culture in Britain, Prager lists songs from catalogues of the publishers Mazin and Yozef and includes the unseen 'Ershter hashiveynu' (First Hashiveynu) and a '3-ter hashiveynu' (Third



songs were both written and published by Yozef the bookseller of 174 Commercial Road, and were essentially the same song: a lively advertisement for songsheets, songbooks and sheet music of Yiddish popular songs that can be bought in his shop. ‘A firter hashiveynu nazad’ has three verses and ‘A finfter hashiveynu nazad’ has four verses. The verses 1, 3 and 4 are almost identical, but the changes are significant. In the first verse the address is given. In ‘A firter hashiveynu nazad’ Yozef’s shop was on the *korner of kanon strit*, and ‘A finfter hashiveynu nazad’ was published to change the address to the corner of Little Turner Street. The two addresses were just one street away from each other on Commercial Road.<sup>21</sup> The first verse continues to advertise what Yozef called his ‘invention’, a songbook. In ‘A firter hashiveynu nazad’ the songbook has ‘All the latest songs / From the best singers in the world / Like Vayznfraynd, Gutentag, Sherman and Akselrod’. These singers were well known actors appearing on the Anglo-Yiddish stage.<sup>22</sup> The songbook being advertised was the *Idishe bine* which was an American publication of theatre songs published in two volumes in 1908 and 1910, which did not contain any of the Anglo-Yiddish songs.<sup>23</sup> By ‘A finfter hashiveynu nazad’ the London Yiddish actors’ names are replaced with a generic ‘performers from across the Yiddish world’. Yet this time the songbook was the *Londoner kupletist*, which was a local songbook which included the local Anglo-Yiddish songs.

The use of the chorus line *hashiveynu nazad* changes in each verse. The first verse of both songs acknowledges Goldfaden’s original song because it suggests the songbooks are bought so that ‘You can sing along with *hashiveynu nazad*.’ The song ‘A finfter hashiveynu nazad’ includes a verse where the shop becomes a library where books can be borrowed for a deposit, so the returning, the *hashiveynu nazad*, is to return the book and reclaim the deposit. The penultimate verse claims that with songbooks life will never be dull, and then, totally out of context, finishes ‘There would be time / And we should go / To Zion, *hashiveynu nazad*.’ Yozef was a known Zionist and this is not the only occasion that he added a Zionist verse out of context, to put across his politics, and of course, this is Goldfaden’s line, so is both political and amusing. The final verse of both songs uses the term *hashiveynu nazad* almost as a full stop. Come back to the shop,

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Hashiveynu). Prager, *Yiddish Culture*, 614. Prager notes how these advert songs generate humour by changing the meaning of *hashiveynu nazad* in each verse. Prager, ‘Der londoner farleger’, 195.

<sup>21</sup> Little Turner Street no longer exists, but was nearly opposite what is present day Turner Street.

<sup>22</sup> This song must be from 1901–2 when Sali and Filip Vayznfraynd were in London.

<sup>23</sup> *Di idishe bine, a zamelbukh fun lider*, 1909–10.

*hashiveynu nazad*. There is one additional point to be made. Yozef's bookshop did not only sell books. As written at the bottom of the songsheet, he also sold 'seforim, tefilin, mezuzes, sidurim, makhzoyrim, bils shir hamalosn, kortn, domines, matses, vayn oyf paysekh, vintshkartn oyf rosheshone.' These are all religious items, study and prayer texts, cards, matzah and wine for Passover. We can imagine that most songsheets were bought by music-hall lovers and they would generally be less orthodox. So it is possible that the song contains a further 'returning', implying that returning to the shop with all its religious accessories could also be a return to an active religious observance of Judaism.

These advertising versions present a Yiddish world of transnational carriers of popular culture. Not only are the singers moving to and fro between Eastern Europe and various Diasporas to perform and sing, there are the sung artefacts they take with them, songs that become popular enough to be published as songsheets and songbooks to be sold locally. And they end up in surprising places. Canadian Yiddishist Chaim Neslen recorded his grandmother singing the song 'Der nayem hashiveynu nazad' when he was a twelve year old in 1950. Esther Djzaldovsky, originally from Poland, remembered hearing the song when she worked as a seamstress at her home in Denmark. Denmark was on the route for Yiddish actors and some would stay with the family. Djzaldovsky remembered the song well enough to repeat all four verses some forty years later. The words *Goulston Street* were muttered on the recording because Djzaldovsky was not clear of what the name of the street was, having never been in the East End of London.<sup>24</sup> This exhibits how cultural texts were carriers of the local to the wider Yiddish world, and it exposes parallels in experience as well as making claim to specific local places and people.

In the list of actors mentioned in the song 'A firter hashiveynu nazad' is the London Yiddish actor/singer Yozef Sherman, and a short satirical poem called 'Hashiveynu nazad' was published in the *Blofer* of May 1913 and dedicated to the same Sherman. The meter precisely fits the tune of 'Hashiveynu nazad', but there is little connection other than the title and there is not even a final chorus line of the words *hashiveynu*

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<sup>24</sup> *Der nayem hashiveynu nazad* performed by Esther Djzaldovsky (c.1950; Toronto: Unpublished recording by Chaim Neslen, n.d.), cassette tape; Chaim Neslen, interviewed by Vivi Lachs, 25 April, 2009.

*nazad*.<sup>25</sup> What it does reference is a forlorn, poor Jew uncertain where to go. The Jew in question is an aging, badly paid actor who has lost his role in the theatre. It is light and clearly satirical and may involve local politics, because at this time Sherman was at the height of his career and a popular ‘household name’ in London.<sup>26</sup> This satirical ‘Hashiveynu nazad’ makes the famous actor become an age-old wandering Jew, a character he might have played on the stage hundreds of times.

The effect of this collection of *hashiveynu nazad* songs is a local popular culture steeped in the wider Yiddish culture of Eastern Europe. It shows the local being tightly connected to the Eastern European homeland through the subject matter and through the connection to Goldfaden’s original song. So these texts are layered with the geography of *Ashkenaz*, Zion and New York. Although I have analysed specific strands in these songs, it is difficult to disentangle them as they are not separate parts, and the performance would put across the totality. There are no strands that can be followed individually, but tangled to become a new cultural artefact which gives and takes in multiple directions.

### ***London bay nakht: the transplantation of song***

The poem ‘London bay nakht’ was written by the socialist poet Morris Winchevsky and published in the *Poylishe yidl* in 1884. The poem begins with a description of streetlamps illuminating London’s streets and walls, with the purpose of providing a clear view of what happens in London at night. Each subsequent verse explores what the lamps do not reveal. These are the poorest people who are hidden from view, hopeless, and desperate. It describes hunger and homelessness, sickness and death, unemployment and confusion and the loneliness of the *griner* (new immigrant) without a family, and too ‘new’ an immigrant to get help from the *Londoner ‘komite layt’* (The London Committee members). In the final verse the streetlamps become symbols and a political statement:

*Zey zenen vi KOMITE LAYT  
tsum SHAYNEN nur gezetst,  
un zeyen nit, un visn nit –  
der shukh bay vemen kvetsht.*

They are like *committee members*  
Who just *shine* sedately  
Without seeing, without knowing  
Whose shoe pinches.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Hashiveynu nazad’, *Blofer*, May 1913.

<sup>26</sup> Mazower, *Yiddish Theatre*, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Morris Winchevsky, ‘London bay nakht’, *PY*, 12 September 1884.

The local content is central, conjuring up London, and possibly the East End of London in the mention of the cobbled streets and the local hospital. The description does not specify that the characters are Jewish apart from the verse about the *griner*. So the characters are generic, they could be Jew or Gentile, although writing in Yiddish readers may have identified with the characters as if they were Jews. Winchevsky's inclusion of Jews in writing about poverty in the wider English society may have been an attempt to encourage Yiddish-speaking immigrants towards an internationalist socialist perspective, rather than maintaining an identity based on religion or ethnicity. The local referencing reaches more widely when it describes the London Committee members. The London County Council was not established until 1889, prior to which the Metropolitan Board of Works (MBW) was responsible for the upkeep of the capital. However, the MBW was seen as corrupt. The London Committee members of the poem are mentioned twice: first in reference to their lack of support for new immigrant Jews. The English establishment did not generally support Jewish immigrants from arrival, making it necessary for Anglo-Jewish charities to take that role. However, even the Jewish Board of Guardians would not support immigrants until they had been living in the country for six months. In the context of the poem, being 'too new' an immigrant meant falling through the support gap, hidden and not illuminated by the streetlights.

'London bay nakht' is not only a local poem written in Yiddish about Jewish and English culture. In the version published in the *Poylishe yidl*, Winchevsky footnoted the poem to explain that 'the form is taken from an old Russian poem.' The poem is *Fonariki* (Streetlights) by Ivan Miatlev.<sup>28</sup> The Miatlev poem is also a satire where the streetlights represent power: government and aristocracy. Miatlev's narrator asks the lamps if they had seen a young woman waiting for her love, an orphan, a sad writer. Yiddish critic Nokhem Minkov argues:

Winchevsky uses the same form, but the social message is much deeper. It is through and through concrete and proletarian. Here we have a starving boy who cannot find a roof over his head. The girl in Winchevsky's poem is not waiting for her beloved. She's waiting by the hospital where her father is dying – and five children at home, and the mother three years dead. Winchevsky introduces an unhappy actor, a 'half-confused old man', and the 'greener' Jew... they are all real, living in London at the beginning of the 1880s.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ivan Miatlev, 1796-1844.

<sup>29</sup> Minkov, *Pionern*, 63.

Using a poem that was well known and composing new words made a statement in addition to the message of the poem itself. In his memoirs Winchevsky explained that even if Russians do not remember Miatlev's name, they would know the opening lines of this poem.<sup>30</sup> So the layers of 'London bay nakht' took on a starker political hue when seen in parallel to Miatlev's poem. Winchevsky offered not only a political perspective on poverty in the East End, but also a sardonic criticism of Miatlev's poem's less radical politics. A benefit of using the structure and wording of a well known Russian poet was that Winchevsky's lyricism was greatly increased. As will be seen in the next chapter, Winchevsky constantly prioritised the political over the aesthetic, and by changing the words to become more radical than Miatlev's original, there may be some implied criticism of poets who chose to be poets rather than political activists. It may also be exposing the restrictions put on Miatlev in terms of artistic freedom, and the greater freedom that Winchevsky had to write political satire in England. Marmor contended that the poem was very popular on both sides of the Atlantic, put to music and 'sung for decades'.<sup>31</sup>

The poem that was sung in America, however, was a slightly altered version. The direct local referencing of London was removed and the title was changed to 'Di lempelekh' (The Streetlights). The new title is the same as the title as Miatlev's poem. Winchevsky did not choose to keep the local flavour in the title, instead even more clearly identifying with Russian literature. The poem is almost identical to the London version, including the cobbled streets and the hospital. However, the *Londoner komite layt* was changed to *di nyuyoriker 8tn strit layt* (The New York 8<sup>th</sup> Street people), reflecting its new location. The substitution is in the same rhythm so reading or singing the text would not affect the rendition of the poem. The lack of changes in the text can be seen to convey how the message and situations in the poem are similar enough to be transferred between diasporic hubs. 'Di lempelekh', with its new words, was even re-published as a songsheet back in London by the Yiddish publisher Yozef.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Winchevsky, *Erinerungen*, 176.

<sup>31</sup> Marmor, *Lebn*, 119.

<sup>32</sup> Winchevsky, 'Di lempelekh', SY. This poem was included in the songbook *Arbayter lider*. Leeds International Workers Education Club, London: n.d. Prager suggests '1894?'. Prager, *Yiddish Culture*, 125. In *Arbayter lider* it is titled 'London bay nakht oder di lempelekh' ('London at Night' or 'The Streetlights'). However it is the version with the local London words.

It is not possible to assess the impact or importance of this poem beyond Marmor's claim above as to its popularity as a song and Minkov's critical analysis of it. However, one could argue that the layered codes offered audiences a feeling that they were part of a larger community: not communities sitting side by side but enveloped within each other, encompassing both the English and the wider Yiddish worlds. The poem gives both a sense of the antagonism between parts of different communities and the shared experience between poor Jews and Gentiles and between immigrants from different Jewish Diaspora communities.

Gaytri Gopinath writes about bhangra music as a place where 'multiple Diasporas intersect both with one another and with the national spaces that they are continuously negotiating and challenging.' In this intersection home country becomes displaced from its 'privileged' position and becomes another Diaspora location.<sup>33</sup> In effect, the multiple locations then cease to be prioritised and all become elements of the cultural output. 'London bay nakht' uses local referencing of the English and Yiddish worlds, refers back to the Russian Gentile world of Eastern Europe, and clearly makes its mark across the Yiddish Diaspora. Writers, such as Winchevsky, knew their audience was broader than local, and in the case of this poem Winchevsky makes the layering explicit. He named places in London, New York and deliberately referenced Russia in a footnote to the poem. In pre-copyright publishing many authors chose to make similar statements about their sources, though many did not. This may show Winchevsky, a socialist, acknowledging his debt to Miatlev, yet it may also show the importance to Winchevsky, an internationalist, of using a Russian inspiration in a Yiddish poem about London.

The transfer of songs across the Yiddish Diaspora was commonplace when there was enough relevant content to transfer between contexts. There were songs without local content that were part of the performers' repertoire and taken with them as they toured the Yiddish world. There were songs with local content that was changed in a similar way to the adaptation of 'London bay nakht'. The song 'Der bal-tovnik' (The Do-Gooder) was written by the Polish immigrant to America Isaac Reingold and was adapted by the London-based Arn Nager to remove the American references and replace them with English ones.<sup>34</sup> There were also songs that may have been heard in

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<sup>33</sup> Gopinath, 'Bombay, UK', 304.

<sup>34</sup> This type of adaptation has an old history. The song *Ot azoy neyt a shnayder* (This is How a Tailor Stitches) was an Eastern European work song from the beginning of the eighteenth century, with

one place and a version of them composed and sung in another location. The song ‘A het oder a get’ (a hat or a divorce) was written by the prolific vaudeville writer Louis Gilrod who emigrated from the Ukraine to America as a child. It was published in the American *Lid magazin*. A version of the song was published in the *Londoner kupletist* with the name of the actor Beki Goldshteyn written under the title as the performer.<sup>35</sup> However, the versions published in New York and London are not simple replacements of local allusions, but significant changes to the text. The chorus is very similar but the verses are completely different. Songs were taken by actors as a part of their repertoire, and then they made them their own. Thus Goldshteyn created a new version of the song, inspired by Gilrod, to perform to a London audience.

Other songs were from one location and verses were added to locate them in the new country. The song ‘Gevalt es iz a shlekhte tsayt’ (Help, It is a Terrible Time) has seven verses as published in the *Idishe bine*. No author is attributed, however it uses the words ‘boarder’ and ‘alright’ which mark it as an American work. The song was also produced as a songsheet by Yozef where an additional verse was composed by him and added at the end. Yozef’s final verse suggests that one way to bring relief from the ‘terrible time’ is to read books, and he gives the address of his bookshop.<sup>36</sup> He also replaces the Americanism ‘boarder’ with the English word ‘lodger’. With some songs produced in both places, it is not always clear which came first, though America produced so much more than England that the American version can often be assumed to be the original. The song ‘Azoy geyt dos gelt avek’ (That’s the Way the Money Goes) describes boys courting girls in Crystal Palace. The chorus title line coupled with the local allusions possibly references the popular mid-Victorian English song ‘Pop Goes the Weasel’, which refers to locations in East London. The Yiddish song was published twice in London: as a songsheet and in the *Londoner kupletist*. It was also published in the American song collection *Yidishe teatr lider* where the term Crystal Palace is replaced with ‘*ekipazhen*’, which means coaches or carriages, removing the local allusion to London and making it transposable to any location.<sup>37</sup> Whichever version came first, it

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additional lyric as the conditions of work changed after union action of the 1880s. Ruth Rubin, *Jewish Folk Songs: In Yiddish and English* (New York: author, 1989), 50. The second verse of the song uses the Russian *gilder*, yet old London Jews sing the song with the word *penny*. They would not necessarily have known that this was a substitution.

<sup>35</sup> Louis Gilrod. ‘A het oder a get’, *Lid magazin*, Vol. 3, New York: n.d.; LK, 6–7.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Gevalt es iz a shlekhte tsayt’, *Idisher bine*, 214–6, YIVO; SY.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Azoy geyt dos gelt avek’, LK, 52; SG; *Yidishe teatr lider* (New York: The Hebrew Publishing Company, 1901), 42-3.

does not alter the argument that songs were interchangeable across the Yiddish-speaking world, showing the similarity of experience particularly in the Yiddish Diaspora. It also meant that composers writing songs with local material knew that their songs may travel and be adapted.

### ***Viktorye park: the ‘glocal’ imaginary***

Martin Stokes describes how music can construct a notion of place that defines a moral and political community in relation to the world in which people find themselves.<sup>38</sup> In Arn Nager’s music-hall song ‘Viktorye park’ he chooses, in the music and lyric of the song, to use a specific place in London to describe the multiple communities that Jewish immigrants inhabit.<sup>39</sup> The actual location becomes symbolic. The borders of the bounded world of the park create a self-contained medium by which to make critical comment. Explicit descriptions combined with layering ‘codes upon codes’ give a strong sense of the transnational world of the East End immigrant population.<sup>40</sup>

The Victoria Park of the title is situated around two miles north of the East End and was a diverse setting. Local amateur historian Charles Poulson describes the park as a mainly left-wing public forum ‘an East End version of the more famous Speakers’ Corner in Hyde Park’, yet serious rather than entertaining. Political meetings, rallies and processions were regularly held there. Poulson quotes from a letter from William Morris to his daughter in 1886 where he described his visit to Victoria park: ‘Had a good meeting, spoke for an hour in a place made noisy by other meetings near, also a brass band not far off.’<sup>41</sup>

Historian Jerry White describes how immigrant children from the Rothschild Buildings were not allowed to play sport in the courtyards of the buildings, so Victoria Park gave them the space to play cricket and football, swimming and boating and listen to a band.<sup>42</sup> The *Jewish Chronicle* in 1909 reported that on a Friday afternoon in Victoria Park the grass was ‘black with thousands of children.’<sup>43</sup> Victoria Park was so popular with the

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<sup>38</sup> Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Nager, ‘Viktorye park’, *LLM*, 15.

<sup>40</sup> Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds*, 87.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Poulson, *Victoria Park: A Study in the History of East London* (London: Stepney Books: Journeyman Press, 1976), 94–101.

<sup>42</sup> White, *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block 1887-1920*, 185.

<sup>43</sup> ‘The Jewish Athletic-Association’, *JC*, 15 January 1909, 6.



Jewish immigrant community, it was nick-named ‘the Polish Brighton’, and the tram or bus heading there ‘the Polish Express’.<sup>44</sup>

Nager’s song ‘Viktorye park’ is set in a Yiddish-speaking Victoria Park community. A fictional image of this familiar place is built up, peopled with an assortment of comic, vulgar and prosaic Jewish characters. Many of the characters are described in a traditional Yiddish style with adjectives (often not complimentary) before the person’s name. So there is fat Annie, red Benny, spotty Fanny. The eclectic mix includes a prostitute living in the City of London, a couple canoodling in the bushes, lads pranking about and immigrants looking for a job. The description of the park is boisterous and noisy, a comic rendition of a familiar place that could be seen as a parody of the East End immigrant community.

However, the local flavour of the song is layered with references to the East European *heyms*, the Anglo-Jewish community and the wider English culture. The song parodies an image of the Eastern European *shtetl* with its similarly eclectic mix of Jewish characters. The *shtetl* is evoked by two clear links to Eastern Europe. Firstly, we are told that Khaye-ita is a prostitute from Lithuania, deliberately locating her in Eastern Europe, and making a wry comment about her *Litvak* origin in an area of mainly Polish Jews. Secondly is the use of the line *landslayt zukhn dort a dzob* / (*Landslayt* are looking for a job there). The word *landslayt* means people who come from the same town in Eastern Europe. So the evocation of the *shtetl* connects the London Diaspora community to the Yiddish Eastern European homeland. The picture drawn of the *shtetl* in ‘Viktorye park’ is grotesque in many ways but it is a caricature, and no less realistic a portrayal than the idyllic homeland created from diasporic nostalgia. In this sense it is comparable to other portrayals that do not represent real situations. Thus the song elicits nostalgia for the *concept* of homeland, and shows the local London Yiddish-speaking community as a part of the wider international Yiddish world; what I have elsewhere called ‘parochial internationalism’.<sup>45</sup> Parochial internationalism both gives a sense of the relationship between local and international, and invokes a narrow-mindedness in the local, and the evocation of the *shtetl* implies an insular community.

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<sup>44</sup> Black, *Social Politics*, 231.

<sup>45</sup> Vivi Lachs, ‘Revolution in Anglo-Yiddish Poetry: Morris Winchevsky’s Strategies to Revolutionise the Jewish Immigrants to Britain, 1884–1894’, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 14, no. 1 (2014): 17.

Nager's composition of the *shtetl* can be explained to some extent by Dan Miron's argument that the *shtetl* had to be portrayed as solely Jewish so that it could become the butt of satire and could be:

exposed as benighted and reactionary, soporific, resistant to initiative and innovation, or, alternatively, portrayed nostalgically and romantically as the quintessence of spirituality and communal intimacy, the nucleus of a besieged civilization that nevertheless enjoyed internal harmony and perfect internal communication.<sup>46</sup>

In this case the Victoria Park *shtetl* comes across as a dysfunctional hodgepodge of people who are generally behaving in anti-social ways. In this way it can critique both the Eastern European *shtetl* as dysfunctional, and Jewish London as vulgar and conflicted. Jewish London does not only include the East End in the song, but also a barbed comment about the vulgarity of Anglo-Jewry. In the final verse, amongst sexually coarse descriptions, we have *Itzik* whose nose is *shpitsik* (pointed), and because his nose is *shpitsik*, he's called *Itzik*. There are not many words that rhyme with *Itzik*, so *shpitsik* is a familiar rhyme. However, in the context of this *double-entendred* song, this line could be an allusion to the anti-Semitic stereotype portrayed by Anglo-Jewish actors, known as 'Hebrew comedians' in the English music hall. A furious article published in the *Tsayt* in 1914 denounced the way Anglo-Jewish actors were prepared to propagate a stereotype of 'the Jew' in the English music hall as a butt of comedy.<sup>47</sup> The allusion to 'the Jew' in the song 'Viktorye park', on one hand makes fun of the use of the stereotype. However, by juxtaposing it in a verse that uses vulgar sexual terminology, the stereotype is shown to be in bad taste, and as such makes a comment on the bad taste of its usage in the English music hall.

There is yet a further layer to this text. Ethnomusicologist Andy Bennett argues that music plays an important part in defining space. When the song's melody is 'creatively combined with local knowledge and sensibilities... [it imposes] collectively defined meanings and significance on space.'<sup>48</sup> In this instance, the melody of the verses of 'Viktorye park' has a striking resemblance to the song 'London Bridge is Falling Down' and the chorus melody is almost identical to the traditional square dance 'Little

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<sup>46</sup> Dan Miron, 'The Literary Image of the Shtetl', *Jewish Social Studies* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 4.

<sup>47</sup> Finklshteyn, 'Hibru komedyes', 2.

<sup>48</sup> Andy Bennett, 'Music, Space and Place', in *Music, Space And Place: Popular Music And Cultural Identity*, ed. Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett, and Stan Hawkins (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 3.

Redwing'.<sup>49</sup> Both tunes are from outside Yiddish culture, give the piece local flavour and clearly locate it in an English environment. So the familiar melody line adds significant additional meaning. Counterpointing the English feel with the image of homeland, and the image of the East End, invites the listener to combine these experiences of location.

This text can be seen as connected to the current discourse on glocalisation that concerns how:

Despite globalisation, transnationalism, international migration and the commercial underpinning of music, each musical genre, in every place required as least some local identification, and had its own internal musical structure, its particular technology, performative contexts and social and political environment.<sup>50</sup>

Thus the local identification that Connell and Gibson deem necessary serves to expose the transnational elements of the Yiddish culture. Despite the lightness of touch of the song 'Viktorye park', the subtext is rich in transcultural capital.

### ***Di simkhes toyre trinker: the contested sphere of religious practice***

'Di simkhes toyre trinker' (The *simkhes toyre* Drinkers) is a satirical poem published in the *Idisher ekspres* by the prolific satirist Avrom Margolis who wrote under the pen name Avreml.<sup>51</sup> This satirical poem is different to the previous texts in this chapter in that it makes no explicit mention of location. Instead, it weaves together familiar characters within a particular religious framework. The religious terminology acts as a marker of location inhabiting a specific cultural position. It may seem strange to see religious metaphors as inhabiting space, yet the nature of religious practice was significantly different in the Eastern European *heyms*, in the orthodox *khevres* and *shtiblekh* (*hasidic* prayer rooms) of the East End and in the Anglo-Jewish synagogues. The strongest religious adherence was connected to practice in Eastern Europe because in Britain, to a larger or smaller degree, religion had become or was becoming anglicised. The dilution of religious practice or the abandonment of religion completely were seen as symptoms of the Diaspora. So when religion is invoked, positively,

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<sup>49</sup> *Victoria Park*, performed by Bertha Jackson (London: Unpublished recording by Derek Reid, 1978), Cassette tape. Jackson was ninety years old in 1978, and remembered learning it as an eight year old, which would date the song to around 1896. Derek Reid, 'Six Yiddish Street Songs of East London', in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Jewish Music 1994*, ed. Steve Stanton (London: City University, 1997), 105–6;

<sup>50</sup> Connell and Gibson, *Sound Tracks*, 191.

<sup>51</sup> Avreml, 'Di simkhes toyre trinker', *IE*, 2 October 1912.

negatively or critically, it has a subtext alluding to particular places. For non-religious or traditional Jews, nostalgia for homeland and nostalgia for orthodox religion were often bound together.

The poem 'Di simkhes toyre trinker' tells of five Jewish characters who are drinking a toast on the festival of *simkhes toyre*. *Simkhes toyre* is a festival which celebrates God giving the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai. The festival is tagged onto the end of a biblical festival and it is a celebration of Jewish law, signified by the Torah. The festival entails reading from the end and the beginning of the Torah, dancing with the Torah scrolls and drinking alcohol. The five verses of the poem ask why the actor, the reverend, the usurer, the anarchist and the poet are drinking on *simkhes toyre*. If any of these characters were religious, there would be no need to ask such a question, so the implicit assumption is that it is strange for these people to be drinking a toast to the Torah, because Torah is not an obvious part of their lives. This is particularly clear with the categories of actors, anarchists, usurers and poets. The orthodox were constantly at odds with actors for their performing on the Sabbath, their loose morals and their scant respect for religious practice. Anarchists actively rejected Judaism and promoted atheism as a part of their political thought. For a usurer, the Torah forbids charging interest from other Jews, and the poet was seen as part of the Jewish enlightenment, the *intelligentsia*, promoting modernist ways of thinking rather than old-world religious ones. So in each verse the question is posed as to why these characters are celebrating the Torah, and answers are posited. The actor has the Torah to thank for art and cultural richness without which the Yiddish theatre would be diminished. The anarchist youth owes the Torah his ability to think analytically. The usurer toasts the laws in the Torah that allow him to charge interest from non-Jews, and the poet has to thank the rich source of biblical poetry.<sup>52</sup>

The Anglo-Jewish reverend is the only character that one could assume would naturally be toasting the Torah. The reverend was a part of the Anglo-Jewish synagogue structure, equivalent to a rabbi, however the term 'rabbi' was reserved for the Chief Rabbi. Religious positions in individual synagogues were given the anglicised term reverend. The poem suggests that the reverend would be an unlikely person to toast the Torah

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<sup>52</sup> Laws forbidding Jews to take interest on loans to other Jews are from Exodus 22:24 and Deuteronomy 23:20-21. This issue is explored in Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

because the immigrants saw Anglo-Jewish practice as having more in common with English church mores and alien to their own Yiddish-style orthodox practice. The answer given was that the reverend, even though he preaches in English, has to take some verses from the bible to add to his sermon, because he does make a living from the religion.

The poem is straightforward and humorous and, as in many parodies, any complexity in the characters is reduced to caricature. The poem is more in the style of a *purimshpil* than for *simkhes toyre*. However, there is an additional element which makes it pertinent to *simkhes toyre* when the Torah as the code of Jewish law is being celebrated. The poem is structured in the style of an argument in the Talmud, and uses Talmudic terminology. The Talmud, with its exegesis of Jewish law, has a particular coded format. This poem mimics a part of the style. Each verse poses a question and suggests a response with the use of the word *teyrets*, which is the Talmudic term for a response. The use of a Talmudic style for a poem about people who are mostly estranged from Talmudic Judaism poses additional questions about the relationship between modern Jews living in emancipated countries and an age old religion. This satirical parody offers an analysis of modernity versus tradition and, in this way, locates characters in Diaspora and questions their relationship to the old cultural norms. However, there is no simple duality between modernity and tradition because these Diaspora or non-religious characters all owe a debt to the Torah. Indeed, it shows the diversity of emerging Diaspora Yiddish cultures.

At the time Avreml wrote this poem, he was the editor of the *Blofer* and wrote regularly for the *Idisher ekspres*. He was living in Berlin and wrote it from there. Just as actors were transnational carriers of culture so the writers also inhabited transnational worlds. Avreml was from Russia, studied medicine in Berlin, then lived in London before ending up in Chicago.<sup>53</sup> He went to and fro between London and Berlin and wrote for American and London papers from wherever he was. The poem 'Di simkhes toyre trinker' portrays tensions in Diaspora culture, and the lack of his usual specific London references may imply that he was writing for a joint audience of London and Berlin. Underneath the title, Avreml dedicated the poem to the popular comic actor Yankev Blaykhman. Whether Avreml was suggesting that Blaykhman added this poem to his

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<sup>53</sup> Prager, *Yiddish Culture*, 437.

repertoire or whether he was reminding Blaykhman of the biblical inspiration to his trade is not known.

Through its satire ‘Di simkhes toyre trinker’ questions religion and its changing nature as it manifests across the Jewish world. This transnational feature can be seen in another poem by Avreml, written in London, titled *strayk epidemye* (Strike Epidemic). This poem is of interest because it is packed with topical references to strikes by London Bakers, house-painters and the local Yiddish press, Other strikes are about American women ‘striking’ against men. The 11<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress in Vienna, Polish workers, anarchists, Russian workers, the Russian government and the trial of Mendel Beilis. The references are scattered throughout the poem jumping from one location to another and back. It is describing conflict and displaying how it exists across the Yiddish speaking world. The implication is that the whole Yiddish world is affected by all of these ‘strikes’ in their different locations.

The importance of other areas of the Yiddish-speaking world to the Yiddish-speaking immigrants in London was ubiquitous. Ben Gidley maintains that the Jewish immigrants’ diasporic memory was key to their immediate response for help during the Kishinev pogrom of 1903. They actively protested when the Anglo-Jews were slower to react. He suggests

a cartography in which active embodied memory kept alive ties to the localised geography of home. From this perspective, rooting in the new land does not mean forgetting of the old Diaspora associationalism is revealed as neither a brake on assimilation nor a vehicle for it, but instead concretely expresses a diasporic geography of belonging, mobilised politically in response to the call to identity heard in Jewish trauma in the old country.<sup>54</sup>

Gidley does not consider cultural texts in his analysis, focusing rather on political activism. However, there were at least three London composed songs about pogroms, two about Kishinev and one about Odessa (1905).<sup>55</sup> The songs seemed to be specifically directed at mobilising the English immigrant community: shocking them and attempting to raise money in support of widows and orphans. Many songsheets don’t have songwriters, yet all of these give details of the writers with addresses.

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<sup>54</sup> Gidley, ‘Diasporic Memory’, 662–3.

<sup>55</sup> Goldberg, ‘Di barimte lid fun kishinyever pogrom’, *SG*; Yozef Semilson, ‘Dos troyerike lid funem keshenever pogrom’, *SY*, Yozef, ‘Der odeser pogrom’, *LK*, 123.

### ***Der blofer lakht: telling the truth***

This final section concerns the series of poems entitled ‘Der blofer lakht’ (The *Blofer* Laughs). They were published as a semi-regular item in five issues of the *Blofer*.<sup>56</sup> Verses of the poems described peoples’ actions that show hypocrisy and exposed them by the character of the *Blofer* laughing at the situation. The name of the journal is vital in understanding the poem. The word *blofer* does not have exactly the same connotations as the English word ‘bluffer’. The English word is lighter and has a sense of good-natured assurance in hoodwinking someone.<sup>57</sup> Prager translates the title *Blofer* as ‘Fibber’.<sup>58</sup> The Yiddish word *Blofer* can include the lighter tone of the English ‘bluffer’, but the punch in Yiddish is that bluffing means lying or cheating and the magazine’s aim was to expose hypocrisy in a satirical way. The byline of the magazine rather paradoxically read: *Ale mentshn zogn lign / kumt der blofer zogt emes* (All people lie / The *Blofer* comes and tells the truth).<sup>59</sup> So, although it explains that it will expose the lying, it does also question whether a ‘bluffer’ can tell the truth. This satirical edge may in fact be the license for the magazine to regularly name and shame or name and embarrass. Indeed, the final version of the poem ‘Der blofer lakht’ satirised how the *Blofer* had come in for criticism and opponents had tried to close it down, but the *Blofer* had survived the ‘hypocrites’ the ‘capitalists’ and the ‘flatterers’ and was still laughing.<sup>60</sup> This version was from the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Blofer*, and the magazine still continued for a further 26 issues.

The five versions of ‘Der blofer lakht’, in different issues of the *Blofer*, contain 21 verses in total and each verse looks at another instance of hypocrisy. Some verses tell of daily events that could happen anywhere, such as journalists writing from positions they

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<sup>56</sup> ‘Der blofer lakht’ appeared in issue numbers 4, 5, 6, 12 and 13. The first three were written under the pen-name *Zimri ben salu*. This name may or may not have been known to readers but, if it was known, it added an additional twist to the poem. *Zimri ben salu* is a character who appears in the bible in the portion of *Pinchas* (Numbers 25: 10–15). He is killed by the leader Pinchas as a punishment for openly having a sexual relationship with a Mideonite woman. Using this as a pen-name could suggest hypocrisy in the biblical reference. It could imply that the author is married to a non-Jewish woman.

<sup>57</sup> As taken from the definitions from Lesley Brown, *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 249. See also the American-Yiddish vaudeville song translated as ‘Bluff! Bluff! Bluff! Nahshon, *New York’s Yiddish Theater*, 247.

<sup>58</sup> Under the listing *Der Bofer* Prager merely translates it as ‘The Bluffer’. However in his listing for Leon Kusman, one of the editors of the *Blofer*, he translates it as ‘The Fibber’. Prager, *Yiddish Culture in Britain*, 388. Beinfeld and Bochner translate the noun *blof* as ‘bluff, fraud’. Solon Beinfeld and Harry Bochner, *Comprehensive Yiddish-English Dictionary* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013), 174.

<sup>59</sup> This byline is on each front cover.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Der blofer lakht’ *Blofer*, Vol 13, April 1912, 16.

don't hold themselves or people begging when they have money in the bank.<sup>61</sup> Although these could be generic they would probably have been topical at the time, applying to particular people that were known in the community. This can be seen in a verse where a woman is being unfaithful with a lodger, and the cuckolded husband is named as Mr Kimmel, which was presumably alluding to a known person, possibly a coded reference.<sup>62</sup> Other verses were directed at more obvious local targets. One verse tells of the new Yiddish theatre employing immigrant trades-people as actors and the audience not noticing the lack of professionalism. Another verse tells of a fiery preacher using Talmudic references in his sermons, yet was a philanderer. Another verse tells us of an un-named 'Lord' who will give his Gentile coachmen generous gifts, but will not support Jewish organisations such as the establishment of a Jewish hospital for the immigrants of the East End.<sup>63</sup> This was, in fact, hardly an expose because it was a huge story. Immigrant Eastenders were giving their hard-earned pennies to buy a plot of land that would become a Jewish hospital. Yet this was fiercely opposed by the Anglo-Jewish establishment and in particular Nathaniel Meyer, the first Lord Rothschild.<sup>64</sup>

The cultural difference between the Anglo-Jewish community and the Yiddish immigrant community is raised again and again in 'Der blofer lakht', often pointing out the tension between sanitised philanthropy and real poverty on the ground in the East End. One verse praises a charitable institution who pay their workers well, yet when a pauper comes to their doorstep begging they dismiss him unthinkingly. Another verse describes an Anglo-Jewish establishment figure, involved in community institutions, who gives charity to the East End soup kitchen, yet also owns a sweatshop subjecting workers to low pay and long hours. Another verse engages in a more angry debate on the attempts at control of the immigrant community by Anglo-Jewish authority. The verse attacks the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews for being familiar with the tenets of Judaism, yet betting on races and behaving in a non-religious way, and still striving for total power and influence over *shechita* (ritual slaughter of animals for kosher food). These verses could be seen to draw a list of tensions and inequalities between the two Jewish communities in England.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Vol 4, November 1911, 12.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Vol 12, March 1912, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Vol 6, December 1911, 16; Vol 4.

<sup>64</sup> See Gerry Black, *Lord Rothschild and the Barber: The Struggle to Establish the London Jewish Hospital* (London: Tynsder Pub, 2000), 52–82.

<sup>65</sup> *Blofer*, Vol 5, December 1911, 11; Vol 6.



Yet a significant number of verses expose how opportunism is possible specifically because of the transnational nature of the immigrant community. Migration enabled a man to lose his past and re-create himself in a new place. He could use migration as an opportunity to improve his life, but it could also be opportunistic and deceptive as the verses of ‘Der blofer lakht’ attest. The problem of abandoned wives was brought up repeatedly in verses of ‘Der blofer lakht’. One such runs:

*Derlozn a vayb in der heym hot eyner,  
un keyn London iz er gekumen  
do hot er als bokher, fayner un shener  
an ander vayb zikh gevolt nemen.  
Dervust hobn zikh di landslayt zayne  
un dos vayb im tsu der khupe gebrakht, -  
gezen hot der blofer di komishe sene  
un zikh gut fun im oysgelakht.*

He left a wife at home  
And came to London  
Here he was a batchelor, fine and beautiful.  
He wanted to take another wife  
His country folk heard about it  
And brought his wife to the wedding canopy.  
The Blofer saw the comic scene  
And had a good laugh at him.<sup>66</sup>

In a similar vein, a verse from an issue from four months later tells of a man of letters who has two wives. It could be, but need not be, the same man as the previous poem. Clearly the *Blofer* has already exposed him because the verse tells of how the twice-married man is so angry at being exposed in the *Blofer* that he tries to close the journal. But the *Blofer* exposes these attempts and in the last line of the verse the *blofer* ‘sticks out his tongue and laughs.’<sup>67</sup> The problem of abandoned wives was well known and did not need exposing. The Yiddish press had adverts attempting to find husbands and reunite them with their responsibilities. This is considered further in chapter five.

Not all problems of immigration were so high on the political agenda of the community. One verse concerned work and how lack of training of religious teachers could make deception easy. The verse runs:

*Dort loyft a yidl, in a kurtsn rekl,  
untern orm a sider, in der hant a shtekl.  
A melamed iz er do, er lernt mit kinder,  
un in der heym iz er gor, - hert a vinder!  
A kovl geven, ferdishe potkoves gemakht.  
Der blofer veys es, nur er shvaygt un lakht.*

There runs a Jew in a short coat  
Under his arm a prayer book, a stick in his hand.  
He is a religious teacher here, teaches children.  
But back home, listen to this miracle! He was  
A blacksmith, made horseshoes.  
The blofer knows this, keeps quiet and laughs.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Vol 12.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Vol 5.

The implication in this verse is that this teacher has re-created himself through moving from Eastern Europe to London. It implies that he would not be seen suitable to be a teacher if he was known to be a blacksmith. This further implies that as a blacksmith in the old country he was not learned or religiously observant enough to be a religion teacher.

A change could also be simply one of political thought or allegiance, and the *Blofer* is very critical of people who ‘change sides’. On one hand it sees inconsistency as hypocritical, and one verse describes a fervent Zionist who tells other Jews to get away from anti-Semitism by going to live in the ‘motherland’, but would never consider going there himself. However, another verse tells of a young man who was a Zionist in the old country and involved in community activities. Yet in coming to London he became first an anarchist and then a social-democrat, and had an active role in a Jewish paper. The *Blofer* laughs at his involvement in community events in London with people who do not know his background.<sup>69</sup>

Looking at the poems of ‘Der blofer lakht’ as a whole, in their attempt to expose hypocrisy, they show the tensions in the Jewish communities of London around money and poverty, around religion and ideologies and around control of the community. It shows the local tensions, the problems in the relationship with Anglo-Jews and the pressures brought on by migration.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to portray the cultural mix contained in the Anglo-Yiddish songs and poems. In part the texts are situated in the Britain the immigrants inhabited and engaged with. They include references to places and events, ideas, politics and anglicised language that were part of daily life. The texts demand an understanding and an acknowledgment of a life that exists and is lived in London. Yet, notwithstanding being written in Yiddish, these texts are clearly not English. They exist as part of a transnational framework that alludes to the Eastern European Jewish homeland, politics and culture. The texts are messy, the references are mixed up, merged, layered and thrown one on top of the other. Yet this concoction is carefully constructed by

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<sup>69</sup> This verse could refer to Moris Mayer, journalist and editor of the *Tsayt*. He was the butt of a number of satirical pieces in the *Blofer*.

Winchevsky, Nager, Avreml and other authors. The texts are crafted to reflect both the confusion of the cultural clash brought about by immigration and the richness of cultural depth as new ideas are encountered.

Texts that seem to be engaging with the acculturation process may not have been geared towards making Jewish immigrants as English as those around them. Rather, they seem to imply the possibilities of a combined culture that can be inclusive of the multiple elements of the immigrants' changing identities. Long before multiculturalism these texts hint at the reality of hybrid identities. The quantity of poetry and songs pushing similar messages, as will be seen in later chapters, creates a very animated and vibrant part of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture.

## Chapter 4: Revolutionising Politics: in the *zeyde* Winchevsky's poetry

*Ven es vet der shtrayt baginen  
far di frayhayt, gegn gelt,  
vet ir efsher mikh gefinen  
in di rayen oyfn feld.*

When the fight begins  
For freedom, against money,  
You may find me  
In the ranks in the battlefield.

*Dortn vel ikh mayne brider  
firn nit als general,  
ikh vel nor mit frayhayt-lider  
zey ermuntern iber al.*

There, comrades, I will  
Not lead like a general,  
Instead, I will encourage  
With freedom poems.

*Den tsum kamf vet men badarfn,  
yenes tog fun hits un drang,  
khuts dem biks, dem shverd dem sharfn,  
a bagaystern gezang.*

Then for the struggle we will need,  
Every heated and driven day,  
Besides the rifle and sharp sword,  
An inspired song.<sup>1</sup>

Morris Winchevsky's poetry written in London between 1884 and 1894 exemplifies a transnational perspective. The poetry engages with the broader internationalist movement of socialism, but also links to local English politics. Yiddish literary critic and historian Nokhum Minkov argued that in his poetry Winchevsky aimed 'to show the origin of all society's woes, explain them and interpret them. So that the workers will rise up, not just against the order of the world, but against definite social attitudes, institutions and people.'<sup>2</sup> Minkov conveys how Winchevsky engaged with a world society through structures and ideas that were familiar. Winchevsky lived in Whitechapel amongst the Jewish immigrant workers he wrote for, drawing pictures in his poetry of people and places that they knew and could relate to. This local knowledge of London immigrant experience was used as a way to draw in workers intellectually and emotionally, yet was in service of wider socialist revolutionary ideas. Many poems were chanted, declaimed and sung as activism and protest on Commercial Street and Mile End Waste.<sup>3</sup> Winchevsky identified a local audience and wrote for them. Yet at the same time, because the poetry was transferable in its ideas, he wrote for *Ashkenaz*,<sup>4</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> Winchevsky, 'In kamf' (In Struggle), *FV*, October 1891. For a translation into English rhymed couplets, see Aaron Kramer, 'Four Yiddish Proletarian Poets: 1. Morris Winchevsky', *Jewish Life*, May 1950, 24–5.

<sup>2</sup> Minkov, *Pionirn*, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Some sung poems were published with sheet music. Morris Winchevsky, *Dray shvester: Three Sisters*, arranged by Henry Lefkowitz, (New York: Metro Music, 1932). 'Dray shvester', 'Es s rirt zikh' and 'Der frayhaytsgayst' were published in M Beregovski and M Fefer, *Yidishe folks-lider*. (Kiev: Melukhe-farlag, 1938), 76–7, 68–9, 88–90. These three songs and 'Tsum arbeter fraynd' and 'A bezem un a ker' were re-published in Moshe Beregovskii and Mark Slobin, *Old Jewish Folk Music: The Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregovski* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 126–8.

<sup>4</sup> Rosman, 'Jewish History Across Borders', 24–5. Also see the methodology section of the introduction of this thesis.

transnational Yiddish world of workers, and his poems were sung, as Melekh Epstein argues:

in the tenement shops of New York, Boston, Chicago, London, and Manchester; in the basement shops of Warsaw, Vilna, and Minsk, and in the underground meetings on Saturdays in the woods. They were also sung in Lemberg, Bucharest, and Czernowitz. Men and women bent over sewing machines and flatirons chuckled over his barbs against pious hypocrites and heartless exploits.<sup>5</sup>

Winchevsky's poetry participates in political and community debate, stating arguments and positions on current affairs and social and party politics. Some of the debates are English discussions on the nature of work and society, poverty and prostitution. Others are internal cultural controversies around religious inequalities and class corruption within the London Jewish world. The poems unequivocally state positions, don't hold punches, and are clear and direct. As such he was a thorn in the side of the Anglo-Jewish establishment who wanted to limit socialist activity and socialist publications.

These two aspects serve to situate the poetry as a force for acculturation and modernity. Jonathan Frankel argues that the dominant issue for socialist activists was not only class conflict and the attempt to integrate into existing labour organisations and trade unions, but also engaging with 'modern secular thought' as a way of acculturation.<sup>6</sup> Winchevsky's poetry encouraged acculturation by demanding that workers become involved with local union activity and English politics. As an internationalist, he was certainly not pushing an anglicisation agenda, though that may have been a by-product, but rather suggesting engagement with current ideas as a first step towards revolution. The aim of the poetry was to move readers to a new way of thinking, a new way of understanding the world and a way of engaging with sophisticated ideas. Indeed, poetry, as a higher art form, could bring elegance, rhythm and encapsulate sharp satirical punch lines to poems that put across difficult ideas. Although Winchevsky claimed not to engage with aesthetics in the way that his comrade William Morris did, the poetic form had a popularity and existence long after his polemical writings were forgotten.

This chapter argues that Winchevsky's poetry is a brilliant lens for seeing how immigrant Yiddish poetry was used as a tool for socialist activism. It explores the mechanisms Winchevsky uses in his attempts to revolutionise the immigrant workers in London's East End. It identifies tendencies within the poems that create different

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<sup>5</sup> Epstein, *Profiles of Eleven*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Frankel, *Prophecy*, 130.

structures or strategies in this process. Anglo-Jewish historiography tells us much about immigrant socialist activity, and conflict between socialists and both the Anglo-Jewish establishment and the immigrant orthodox. It details activism around strikes and internal disputes between socialists and anarchists. By seeing the known historiography through the eyes of Winchevsky's poetry, this chapter highlights a new aspect. It nuances the broad strokes by adding detail as to how an important socialist figure put across radical ideas in poetry, in an attempt to awaken the Jewish workers.

Winchevsky's overall aim was to be a *veker*, an awakener, to be an influential part of political debate. His desire was to help produce a 'cognitive rupture', where the political awakening was more important than the aesthetic means.<sup>7</sup> Although the power of poetry was the reason for his prolific output in verse, literary critics strongly criticised his poetic style, and his position in the canon of Yiddish poetry was hotly contested. The influential Socialist Yiddish writer, A. Litvak, saw Winchevsky as a successful *veker* but an unsuccessful poet, using 'childish' couplets which were no more than 'revolutionary *batkhones*' akin to Zunser.<sup>8</sup> On the other side, literary critic Abraham Bik and Kalman Marmor defended and analysed the lyricism within the poetry.<sup>9</sup> Countering the criticism himself, Winchevsky argued that he was intentionally more activist than lyrical poet and would use any means in his power of writing to achieve his goal:

If anyone who sings my praises finds more activism in my work than poetry, they should not forget that... I did not publish anything that did not aim to awaken the Jewish worker: wake him, his brain, his heart and his class consciousness: force him to stand up, rub his eyes and ask himself: Who am I? What sort of world is this around me? How did I get fettered by religious cobwebs and political nonsense.... If you call this activism, very good. It makes no difference to me how I awaken. A stab in the ribs is as good as shining a large torch into closed eyes. If a laugh can awaken, I laugh. If a complaint does so, I complain. If a smile can draw a sympathetic look – I smile, if not I will try a sigh.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Nineteenth Century revolutionary poetry has been understood as functioning to provoke a 'rupture' which forces the reader to contemplate an alternative existence. Pauline Johnson, *Marxist Aesthetics (Routledge Revivals)* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 100. The term 'cognitive rupture' comes from Sanders, *Poetry of Chartism*, 10. Sanders' analysis of poetry from the Chartist movement argues that the political and aesthetic were 'thoroughly imbricated practices'. *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Litvak, 'Vintshevski, der onheyber', 4-8. Although *batkhones* means rhyming couplets used by a wedding jester, in Litvak's criticism it could be translated as 'doggerel'. For Zunser, see chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> Bik, *Troymer, kemfer*, 5-34; Bik, 'Moris Vintshevski, der liriker'. *YK*, August-September (1956): 11-15; Marmor, *Lebn*, 379-93. The critic A. Litvin argued that revolutionary workers' songs, including those of Winchevsky affect both spirit and aesthetics, and as such are located between folk-poetry and modern Yiddish poetry. A. Litvin, 'Di revolutsyonere lid un di folks-lid, - di ershte revolutsyonere lid – a mitl fun agitatsye. In *Idishe literatur* Vol 1, ed. M. Levitan. Kiev: kultur lige, 1928, 318-320.

<sup>10</sup> Winchevsky, *Mayn arbeter-muze*, *YK*, (May 1952): 43. First published *Frayn un lebn* (1912).

Based on this source, and on the poem that heads this chapter, I have extrapolated five broad tendencies to be used as ways of structuring and exploring the mechanisms of Winchevsky's poetry. The first tendency is the attempt to awaken the worker's 'heart'. A series of sentimental *Londoner siluetsn* (London Silhouettes) use pathos to describe the lives of children in extreme poverty in the London that workers saw around them every day. The second tendency is to awaken the worker's 'brain' and 'class-consciousness'. A number of poems try to explain and interpret socialist principles and revolutionary ideas. The third tendency attacks 'religious cobwebs'. Some key poems use religious terminology to expose inequality in both Anglo-Jewish and immigrant sections of religious authority. The fourth tendency concerns 'what sort of world' this is. In a series of poetic *notitsn*, opinionated verses on current affairs, Winchevsky engages with politics of England and the wider Yiddish world. The final tendency concerns producing songs for 'activism'. The last line of the poem 'In kamf', which heads this chapter, is the acknowledgment that an important weapon in the struggle is 'an inspired song'. Many poems that were put to music and sung in the workplace, at rallies and demonstrations, used stirring lyrics of revolution and visions of a future of equality and harmony.

### **Introducing Morris Winchevsky**

Morris Winchevsky, was born Leopold Benzion Novokhovitch in 1856 in Yanove, Kovno, Lithuania and brought up with Yiddish as his mother-tongue.<sup>11</sup> He had a traditional religious education in bible and Hebrew at home, and from the age of eleven studied in a Russian government school where he learned Russian and German. After finishing school he worked as a clerk interpreter in a bank while translating Russian poets into Hebrew and writing his own poetry.<sup>12</sup> At age 20 he was influenced by the work of radical Jewish socialist Aaron Liberman and started writing for Liberman's Hebrew socialist magazine *Ha-Emes* (The Truth). A year later he moved to Königsberg, working for the German socialist movement and setting up his own socialist journal *Aseyfes khakhomim* (Meeting of the Wise). During his time in Germany he was influenced by populist writers Bakunin and Lavrov and became involved in nihilist and

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<sup>11</sup> Biographical details are mostly from Winchevsky, *Erinerungen*; Marmor, *Lebn*; Epstein, *Profiles of Eleven*, 13–35; Rucker and Ward, *London Years*, 57–9; Fishman, *Radicals*, 138–44.

<sup>12</sup> For Winchevsky's early Hebrew poems, see Bik, *Troymer, kemfer*; A. Malakhi, *Moris vintshevski (tsu zayn zibetsik yorikn yubilum)*, *Tsukunft*, September (1926), 501–4; A. Malakhi, *Moris vintshevski (tsu zayn 75-yorikn yubilum)*, *Tsukunft*, November (1930), 768–60.

socialist activity. However, under Bismarck's first anti-socialist laws in 1878, Winchevsky was arrested for having letters from Liberman in his possession. He was in prison for five months before getting bail.

Winchevsky arrived in London on 23 March 1879. In Whitechapel he was confronted with the desperate conditions for the mass of Jewish workers and he struggled to earn a living, eventually getting work as a bookkeeper in a London branch of Seligman's bank. Using the pseudonym Leopold Benedict in his job, Winchevsky continued to write socialist material. However, in order to communicate ideas of socialism and revolution to the worker, Winchevsky chose to write in Yiddish, rather than Russian, German, Hebrew or, indeed, English.<sup>13</sup> Winchevsky established, edited and contributed to the London Yiddish socialist press. He wrote editorials, feuilletons and theatre reviews for the *Poylishe yidl*, later re-named the *Tsukunft* (Future). He wrote the satirical column 'Bilder un verter fun a meshugene filozof' (Pictures and Words from a Crazy Philosopher) and translated classics, such as Ibsen, into Yiddish for the *Arbayter fraynd*. He wrote *notitsn* (notes) on political events in the *Fraye velt* (Free World) and later also edited the Social-Democratic *Veker* (Awakener).<sup>14</sup>

Winchevsky's first poem was published in the third issue of the *Poylishe yidl*. 'Tsvey geslekh' (Two Alleys) is a satire on gambling, written because 'the plague of cards at that time... devastated many families' lives.'<sup>15</sup> The poem was so well received that the famous Yiddish actor Jacob Adler declaimed it from the London Yiddish theatre stage in the same week as publication.<sup>16</sup> Winchevsky's friend and collaborator Philip Krantz, although positive about the subject matter, strongly criticised the 'absurd' over-usage of diminutives.<sup>17</sup> There were few models for Yiddish poetic style in the 1880s, and although both Elyokum Zunser and Abraham Goldfaden addressed 'social motifs' in their verse and song lyrics, they were not making the sort of socialist political

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<sup>13</sup> Winchevsky was also active in English socialist circles. Nathan Ausubel, 'The Story of Yiddish', *MF*, 11 August 1947. Some of his writing appeared in English socialist publications, such as the SDF's *Justice* and *Today* and the SL's *Commonweal*. Epstein, *Profiles of Eleven*, 33. He sometimes wrote under the pseudonym Jim from Bethnal Green. He translated his story *Grishke's roman* into English which was published in the *London Sun* in 1893 and later in Morris Winchevsky, *Stories of the Struggle* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1908), 3. See also Marmor, *Lebn*, 138–9, 154.

<sup>14</sup> Winchevsky, *Der meshugene filozof in england* (New York: The Forward Association, 1920).

<sup>15</sup> *PY*, 15 August 1884. Quote from Winchevsky, *Erinerungen*, 174.

<sup>16</sup> An advert in the *PY* for Adler's Hebrew Dramatic Club stated: 'Mr Adler will soon perform in a new sketch "Menakhem ben Israel" and will then declaim our poem "Tsvey geslekh" which is printed in this issue of the *Poylishe yidl*.' Adler's rendition of 'Tsvey geslekh' was still being advertised as a theatre piece the week later. *PY*, 15 and 22 August 1884.

<sup>17</sup> Winchevsky, *Erinerungen*, 175.



statements that Winchevsky had made in his Hebrew verse and wanted to continue to do so in Yiddish.<sup>18</sup> Winchevsky began to write poetry regularly for the Yiddish press, contributing hundreds of poems.<sup>19</sup> His complete works, edited by Marmor, comes to nine volumes, only one of which is poetry. Yet it was his poetry that was most popular. Winchevsky was so successful that he was nick-named the *zeyde*, the grandfather of Jewish socialism.

Yiddish critic, Shakhne Epstein claimed that Winchevsky ‘was from the beginning, not a socialist, not an anarchist, but simply a revolutionary.’<sup>20</sup> Winchevsky did not ally himself with a political party on the left. He supported the SDF and the SL working together and amongst the Jewish left worked with both socialists and anarchists. Marmor argued that Winchevsky was situated in the camp of Marx and Engels, yet was ‘all party’ and saw differences between socialists and anarchists as academic, calling the anarchists ‘stepbrothers’ and ‘cousins’. He considered it vital that they cooperate to establish unions, lead strikes and maintain a community press and club with library and reading room.<sup>21</sup> The *Arbayter fraynd* took on this principle of broad coalitions and in Krantz and Winchevsky’s editorial of the first issue argued:

The *Arbayter fraynd* will not chiefly be a one party paper. This means it will embrace all important opinions on different socialist questions, even when these opinions do not agree with ours. Our party is simply against today’s society, against all injustice in the world, but we are friends of all socialists whatever opinions they have about socialist questions, which divide us now.<sup>22</sup>

Winchevsky’s transparent non-partisan stance allowed both socialists and anarchists to claim him as one of their own and to see him as fighting for their cause. And some of the debate about positioning on the left happened through poetry.<sup>23</sup> The popular anarchist proletarian ‘sweatshop’ poet Dovid Edelshtadt wrote poetry from first-hand experience of New York’s Lower East Side sweatshops. He admired Winchevsky’s unique position and his ability to write about the sweating system from the outside:

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<sup>18</sup> Minkov, *Pionirn*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> The poetry was re-produced in collections of his own poetry and of socialist poetry including: *Gezamelte verk: lider; LUG; Di fraye harfe; Der londoner arbayter zinger; Freiheit: Revolyutsyonere lider un shirim* (Geneva: Bund Publishers, 1905).

<sup>20</sup> Shakhne Epshteyn, *Moris vintshevski (tsu zayn 60-sten geburtstog)*, *Tsukunft*, December (1916): 1045.

<sup>21</sup> Marmor, *Lebn*, 157–8, 163–4.

<sup>22</sup> *AF*, 15 July 1885.

<sup>23</sup> For an examination of Winchevsky’s inclusive politics, see Vivi Lachs, ‘The Yiddish Veker in London. Morris Winchevsky: Building a Broad Left through Poetry 1884-1894’, *Socialist History*, no. 45 (2014): 1–24.

<i>Zayn shraybn derfilt mir mit hofnung un mut,</i>	His writing makes me feel hope and courage,
<i>dokh ken ikh zikh gut nit derklern!</i>	Yet I cannot explain myself well!
<i>vi kumt in zayn tinter mayn harts blut?</i>	How does my heart's blood come to his inkwell?
<i>Vi kumen tsu oys mayne trern?</i>	How do my tears reach him? <sup>24</sup>

Yet, despite Edelshtadt's respect for Winchevsky, he felt hugely let down when, by 1890, the *Arbayter fraynd* was taken over by the anarchists, and Winchevsky and editor Konstantin Gallop left with other social-democrats to set up the *Fraye velt* (Free World).<sup>25</sup> Marmor argued that Winchevsky was no longer seen as 'all party' as much as 'anti-party'.<sup>26</sup> Edelshtadt regarded Winchevsky's departure from the *Arbayter fraynd* as an abandonment of both the anarchists and the principle of a broad left and criticised him in the poem 'Mayn muze':

<i>Mit gleklekh kon mayn muze nit klingen...</i>	My muse cannot ring with bells...
<i>Zi vet ir kegnen di hant nit derlangen,</i>	She will not reach the opponent's hand,
<i>zi vet nit kushn zayn giftike lip,</i>	She will not kiss his poisonous lips,
<i>zi veys, az ir kegners beste farlangen</i>	She knows that her opponent's greatest desire
<i>iz zen dem toyt fun ir printsip.</i>	Is to see the death of her principle. <sup>27</sup>

Edelshtadt saw Winchevsky as defecting to the social-democrat camp, and no longer prepared to fight under a banner inclusive of anarchism. Edelshtadt's outrage indicates the importance of Winchevsky's position as a non-partisan figure of the left. Winchevsky's poetic response to Edelshtadt shows the vested interest in attempting unity on the left. The poem 'An d. edelshtat' (To D. Edelshtadt) was full of injured feelings and righteous anger, evidently suspecting other agendas in play:

<i>Du shtrofst mikh, shtrenger kritiker,</i>	You reprove me, strong critic,
<i>mit halb farshtelte reyde;</i>	With half-hidden words;
<i>ikh bin nit keyn politiker</i>	I am not a politician
<i>un zog: dos tut mir leyde.</i>	And say: I am sorry.
...	...
<i>Dayn ziser lider-klang,</i>	Your sweet poetic sound,
<i>volt klingen shener, herlekher</i>	Would sound more beautiful, more honest
<i>on kine in gezang.</i>	Without envy in the verse. <sup>28</sup>

As the *Arbayter fraynd* became anarchist, the leading lights of the Jewish socialist press migrated from London to New York.<sup>29</sup> It became impossible for the two groups,

<sup>24</sup> Dovid Edelshtadt, 'Tsum meshugenem filozof, *AF*, March 1890.

<sup>25</sup> Rocker and Ward, *London Years*, 61–2.

<sup>26</sup> Marmor, *Lebn*, 158–9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

socialists and anarchists, to continue friendly contact. Winchevsky stayed in London, describing his new paper, *Fraye velt*, as the continuation of the *Arbayter fraynd*. The new venture was run by socialist intellectuals who embraced the communist maxim: ‘From *each* according to *his ability*, to *each* according to *his need*.’ In its pages Winchevsky continued to argue his non-partisan position. The poem ‘Parti politik’ was an explicit statement of how he did not want to be pigeon-holed into taking one position:

*Ikh loz nit fartsamen  
mayn veg durkh programen,  
ikh ken keyn partey-man nit zayn;  
ikh ken mayn gevisn  
nit binden un shlisn...*

I will not let my approach be confined  
By political programmes,  
I cannot be a party-man;  
I cannot bind and lock  
My conscience...

*Ikh vil nit bashrenken  
mayn moyekh tsu denken  
azoy vi es denkt di partey...*

I do not want to limit  
My mind to think  
Just as the party thinks...<sup>30</sup>

The poem earned him a rebuke from hardliners. Litvak condemned Winchevsky as a party political activist who simply would not adhere to party discipline.<sup>31</sup>

In 1892, Winchevsky was involved in the organisation of a Jewish ‘general council’. This council brought together almost all of the Jewish unions in London, including workers associations and Social-Democrats, into the Jewish Socialist Workers’ Union. Their principal aim was to unite workers in strikes, boycotts, demonstrations and political activism. From 1892 the Socialist Workers’ Union brought out the weekly *Der veker* (The Awakener), with Winchevsky as the most significant and influential contributor of poetry and prose.<sup>32</sup> In the first edition the poem ‘Der veker tsu di kemfer’ (An Awakener for the Fighters) was published. It was an attempt at a song of unity, demanding in its opening line that the broad left should: *Viklt fanander di fone di royte* (Unfurl the red flag), and beneath the flag he demanded ‘the humanity of brothers’ to ‘march together today.’<sup>33</sup> Poetry as a medium of debate and conversation was an integral part of Jewish socialist activity.

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<sup>29</sup> This move: ‘symbolized the new status acquired by New York and the relative decline of London’. Frankel, *Prophecy*, 119.

<sup>30</sup> Winchevsky, ‘Parti politik’, *FV*, July 1892, 57.

<sup>31</sup> Litvak, ‘Vintshevski, der onheyber’, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Marmor, *Lebn*, 172–3.

<sup>33</sup> Winchevsky, ‘Der veker tsu di kemfer’, *Veker*, 23 December 1892. This poem was later re-named ‘A kamf-gezang’.

## Poetic Tendencies Towards a Revolutionary Aim

### *Londoner siluetsn: awakening the heart.*

As early as 1885 there had been complaints by readers to *Der Arbayer fraynd* about the level of complexity in articles. The articles were seen as too theoretical and complicated and did not relate to their worker-readers' lives.<sup>34</sup> Winchevsky's poems, however, were all written in rhythmic rhyming couplets which made them memorable and easy to chant or sing. By using narrative poetry, moreover, a simpler and more emotional approach could be made and this could contribute creatively to polemical debate. In this section I discuss Winchevsky's narrative ballads about London life that seem to demand an affective response of sympathy or anger. From the pen of the 'veker' (awakener), these poems can be seen as a trigger to create an emotion that would start a thought process, generate interest, waken the workers to greater understanding and stimulate action.

In his memoirs, Winchevsky recalls how he produced a series of poems 'written under the influence of the terrible poverty around me, - from this poverty in all its nakedness, tattered, rancidity that one can see only in London.'<sup>35</sup> Based on these ballads, literary critic A. Prints called Winchevsky 'the singer of need and loneliness of the London masses.'<sup>36</sup> They were published in the Yiddish press between 1884 and 1891, and later brought under the title *Kinder funs folk: Londoner siluetsn* (The Nation's Children: London Silhouettes).<sup>37</sup> Although Winchevsky had experienced poverty in his youth in Lithuania, Nokhum Minkov suggested that Winchevsky saw the poverty in London as worse than that of Kovno, because he was seeing it 'with the eyes of a conscious socialist.' It was therefore a deliberate strategy to write ballads with 'sentimental despondent lyricism' to 'describe a class, their fight and bitter lives.'<sup>38</sup> Ballads are an accessible medium. They tell stories and Winchevsky's ballads did so with pathos, and usually with a sharp social comment in a chorus line. The descriptions, directed at the

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<sup>34</sup> *AF* editor Philip Krantz justified difficult material by arguing: 'Readers, especially Jewish readers, need food for thought. All Jews can study the Talmud, since eventually they need to understand God; so the *Arbayer fraynd* should not surpass their level of comprehension either'. *AF*, 15 October 1885. Quoted in Karin Hofmeester, *Jewish Workers and the Labour Movement: A Comparative Study of Amsterdam, London and Paris (1870-1914)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 127.

<sup>35</sup> Winchevsky, *LUG*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> A Prints, 'Vintshevskis lider'.

<sup>37</sup> Winchevsky, *LUG*, 145–200.

<sup>38</sup> Minkov. *Pionirn*, 20–1.

worker, explored the inequality of a system that created poverty, and appealed to the worker to respond with an emotion that would be productive to change.

The attempt to elicit an active emotional response was made explicit in the poem 'Tsum nayem yor' (To the New Year). It tells the story of the emotions of a seventy-year-old man who never shows anger. The old man condemns the old year with sadness, prays for food with bitterness, buries his child with grief and finally dies calmly. The New Year responds with the argument that the appropriate response to all these events should have been anger. Anger alone has the power to make change.<sup>39</sup> Prints argued that Winchevsky described suffering with 'authentic, non-artistic simplicity' and intimacy, and that this fuelled the 'emotional anger' of the worker-reader.<sup>40</sup>

Winchevsky's approach to stimulating the anger he regarded as necessary to combat poverty, was to portray the worst of what he saw in a simple narrative. The poem 'Nur dos nit' (Just Not This), explained that 'the worst' meant the sight of a child languishing, hungry, starving, sick and begging.<sup>41</sup> Winchevsky therefore focused on tales of children in poverty in London working for their living and the effect hardship had on their lives. In 'Oreme yosele' (Pauper Yosele), a small boy sells wares from a couple of boxes on the street. The poet's narrator questions the boy about the importance of cleanliness, education and honesty. Despite his increasing insistence that knowledge is the only way out of poverty, to each question the boy replies in a repeated chorus chant that his only priority is to earn enough to eat.<sup>42</sup> 'A meydele in der siti' (A Little Girl in the City) follows a homeless orphan selling matches in Cornhill, London's business district. The tiny girl stands in the rain and thunder repeating 'Buy matches Sir / Two boxes a penny, one penny the pair!' as she is surrounded by brokers and office workers, rushing past her to their workplaces.<sup>43</sup> But perhaps the clearest example of the way a sentimental poem draws out feelings of sympathy, that can lead to anger, is the poem 'Dray shvester' (Three Sisters). The poem became immediately popular and put to music.<sup>44</sup> It tells the story of three sisters working in Leicester Square in the west End of London.

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<sup>39</sup> Winchevsky, 'Tsum nayem yor', *AF*, 3 January 1890.

<sup>40</sup> Prints, 'Vintshevskis lider'.

<sup>41</sup> Winchevsky, 'Nur dos nit'. *AF*, 30 January 1891.

<sup>42</sup> Winchevsky, 'Oreme yosele', *Tsukunft*, 16 January 1885.

<sup>43</sup> Winchevsky, 'A meydele in der siti', *Tsukunft*, 27 March 1885.

<sup>44</sup> Winchevsky, Morris, *Dray shvester: Three Sisters*, arranged by Henry Lefkowitz. New York: Metro Music, 1932. Dovid Katz called 'Dray Shvester' Winchevsky's most famous poem. Dovid Katz, *Words On Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 327.

*In england iz do a shtot lester,  
in london iz do aza skver,  
in skver shteyen teglekh dray shvester,  
di meydlekh, — zey ken ver-nit-ver.*

*Di yingste farkoyft dortn blumen,  
di mitelste — bendlekh fun shikh  
un shpet in der nakht zet men kumen  
di eltste vos handlt mit zikh.*

In England there is a town called Leicester,  
In London there is such a square,  
Each day three sisters stand in the square,  
The girls — everybody knows them.<sup>45</sup>

The youngest sells flowers there,  
The middle one — shoelaces  
And late at night one can see approaching  
The oldest, who sells herself.<sup>46</sup>

One possible reason that ‘Dray shvester’ was so popular was because it did not only describe and comment on poverty, but contributed to debate of the time. ‘Dray shvester’ was written within the context of campaigns around the age of consent, prostitution and the white slave trade. In 1885 William Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, had produced a sensational piece of journalism published as ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’. Stead had gone undercover to expose child prostitution abuses in London, aiming to publicise and campaign against the low age of consent. The report gave detailed accounts of the trade in young women and girls, publishing anonymous interviews and testimonies with people involved in the trade including trafficked girls, and disclosing the process of procuring underage and virgin girls. The ‘Maiden Tribute’ shocked the public and may have been a contributing factor to parliament raising the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen in the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885.<sup>47</sup> In Winchevsky’s poem, age is an important element. The sister who sells her body is the oldest of the three, though that does not tell us whether or not she was over the age of consent. However, Winchevsky did not simply reference a topical issue, he added a socialist perspective through the words of his characters. The third verse runs:

*Di yingere beyde batrakhtn  
di eltere shvester on has;  
den ale dray meydlekh farakhtn  
di velt un di shtot un di gas.*

The two younger ones both think of  
Their older sister without hatred;  
Because all three girls despise  
The world and the town and the street.

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<sup>45</sup> A version of this song substitutes ‘Leicester’ with ‘Manchester’. Manchester was the second largest immigrant community in England. Manchester Square is in Marylebone, London, though not known for its prostitutes. *Dray shvester*, performed by Zelig Shnadover (n.d.; Mexico City: Unpublished recording by Itzik Gottesman, n.d.), mp3.

<sup>46</sup> Winchevsky, ‘Dray shvester’, *FV*, October 1891.

<sup>47</sup> See William Stead, ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon: The Report of Our Secret Commission’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 July 1885. See also Bristow, *Prostitution, Prejudice*, 37–8, 40–2.

The last line of the verse makes the sisters the instrument for arguing that society is the problem, not the individual.<sup>48</sup> Their simple hatred draws anger, which is mixed with helplessness. The final stanza shows the sisters at home with their tears drenching the shoelaces and flowers.

A different interpretation is offered by Marc Miller, who sees the tears at the end of the poem as portraying a destructive sadness, because they saturate and ruin the merchandise that provides the sisters' livelihood.<sup>49</sup> This reading of the poem casts the sisters as victims with no option but to cry in self pity. This interpretation may be convincing when viewing 'Dray shvester' as an example of lyrical poetry, which is the subject of Miller's research in relation to fellow poet Morris Rosenfeld. However, in doing so, Miller ignores the political context of the poem and his interpretation lessens the power of the poem's statement. In Miller's analysis, the poem becomes more literal and one-dimensional, ignoring the anger of the penultimate verse. Being viewed as a lyrical poet was important to Rosenfeld, but being a *veker* was more important to Winchevsky.

The *Londoner siluetn* are full of memorable images of children, showing them as young victims in their parents' lives. 'Rent' describes the fate of a family after the death of the father and wage-earner Barnet Mass of Berner Street, leaving his pregnant wife unable to pay the rent.<sup>50</sup> 'Oyfn stred' (On the Strand) follows the young child of parents who take her with them to the pub to drink their pay rather than buying food for *shabes*.<sup>51</sup> A particularly shocking poem is 'Di farfroyene' (The frozen ones) which tells of parents and three children, wandering homeless in the English frost. The setting is not London, but a mythical English 'forest' where they freeze to death.<sup>52</sup> Bik compared this poem to a similar poem by Heine where two unfortunates freeze to death in an attic on a winter night. Heine's children die from cold and hunger and the message is a tragic one. Bik

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<sup>48</sup> The socialist message of 'Dray shvester' maintained its power years later. Yiddish folk singer Karsten Troyke explained that he had learned the song from the Argentinian actress, Cipe Lincovsky, who had been singing it as part of her repertoire. Troyke wrote: 'Cipe told me, that Helene Weigel [widow of Bertolt Brecht and then chief of his theatre] handed the lyrics to her, saying that Brecht loved the song for being so strong with the social idea – because the sisters blame the circumstances and society for being a prostitute, not their sister herself.' Karsten Troyke, Personal email correspondence with VL, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Marc Miller, *Representing the Immigrant Experience: Morris Rosenfeld and the Emergence of Yiddish Literature in America* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 72.

<sup>50</sup> Winchevsky, 'Rent', *AF*, 15 December 1885.

<sup>51</sup> Winchevsky, 'Oyfn stred', *LUG*, 198.

<sup>52</sup> Winchevsky, 'Di farfroyene', *AF*, 23 January 1891.

argued that Winchevsky's message is significantly different to Heine's because, under Winchevsky's pen, they are not 'tragedies' but 'sacrifices to the system.'<sup>53</sup> Bik contended that Winchevsky's writing was not beautiful art or talented work, but a 'categorical imperative from his socialist conscience and not just an unloading of suffering.' Social realism was his 'dream and passion' in order to make political arguments.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the comparison between Heine and Winchevsky only serves to make the socialist message stronger.

Although the poems discussed in this section are full of sentimental pathos, they attempt to create images that can be seen as representative of a situation, thus making political points and entering debates about poverty, child labour, education or prostitution. The children in the ballads may or may not have been Jewish. Charitable measures put in place by the Jewish Board of Guardians, Friendly Societies and synagogues tried to help starving Jewish children. Writing in Yiddish for a Jewish audience, Winchevsky's motivation was to get an emotional response. He did not need to make the children Jewish to touch a raw nerve sparking peoples' fears for their own families.

Winchevsky did not only use pathos. He was an accomplished satirist, and in the poem 'Di oreme maria' (The pauper Maria), it can be argued that Winchevsky tried to shock his reader into anger. The poem describes how British justice tied the poor into an impossible cycle of poverty. Maria, probably a teenager, is left to look after her siblings after being orphaned. Made unemployed during the 'slack', she is destitute and desperate. First she begs, then steals, then solicits to make money for food. When given a shilling, she drinks it to drown her sorrows, and finally tries to drown herself. Each time she is caught and jailed by a pompous magistrate who declares begging, stealing, soliciting, being drunk in public and attempting suicide to be 'strictly forbidden in England.' In the final verse Maria takes the only legal action she can, which is to die of hunger on the street. The seventeen-verse poem is split into six sections, with the first five sections repeating the same three lines, substituting the first word:

*Betlen in england iz shtrengstens farbotn.  
Un dos derklert ir der her magistrat,  
velkher zet oys zeyer kreftik un zat...*

Begging in England is strictly forbidden.  
So the magistrate explained to her,  
Who appeared energetic and satisfied...<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Bik, *Troymer, kemfer*, 25–6.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>55</sup> Winchevsky, 'Di oreme maria', *AF*, 25 October 1889.



The magistrate then passes his verdict usually of a prison sentence. The magistrate and Maria, rather than being emblematic of types of people, like Winchevsky's portrayal of children, are more like caricatures. They could be characters in a music-hall song with a running gag. The poor and feisty Maria set against the pompous arrogant magistrate. It is on the edge of comedy, where the repetition, rhythm and song-like rhyming structure creates a wry humour. The story is tragic, yet makes fun of the system because even the attempted suicide is forbidden in England. The shock of the final verse slams a lid on the humour ramming home the message that a system that gave no legal assistance to the most poor is unjust. Maria lies dead in an unknown place, and the poet asks:

<p><i>Ver veys, tsi veys zi – az shtarbn fun noyt,</i>  <i>mit a GEZETSLIKHN, RUIKN toyt,</i>  <i>IZ NIT in fraye medines farboten.</i></p>	<p>Who knows if she knows – that starving from  want,  With a LEGAL, PEACEFUL death,  IS NOT forbidden in free countries.</p>
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*Di oreme maria*, like other poems in the *siluetn*, takes the side of the debate that blamed the system that kept the poor poor, and are ultimately anti-capitalist. These poems, written between 1885 and 1891, coincided with a time when there was a particular focus on poverty. In 1885 the *Pall Mall Gazette* had published the results of a survey by the SDF which showed that 25% of Londoners lived in poverty. Charles Booth, sceptical about the high degree of poverty, was inspired by the survey to ascertain the real situation. Starting with East London he did his own ethnographic research. The first part of his survey of the East End were published in 1889 and he found that the degree of poverty was even higher than the SDF had claimed.<sup>56</sup> Winchevsky, as close as he was to the SDF, must have been aware of these surveys and ensuing discussion. His poetry can be seen as writing from within that debate, encouraging workers to continue the discussion.

Setting the poems in a London context may have forced workers to engage with their new country. Yet understanding socialist politics could not be the preserve of affect alone, and Winchevsky often used a more explicitly conceptual approach.

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<sup>56</sup> Charles Booth, *Charles Booth's London. A Portrait of the Poor at the Turn of the Century, Drawn from His 'Life and Labour of the People in London'*, ed. Albert Fried, Richard. M. Elman, and Raymond Williams (London: Hutchinson, 1969), xx–xxiv.

### *Tsu di arbeter: awakening the brain and class-consciousness*

The reality of many workers' daily lives was work in the sweating system, and Winchevsky wrote many poems that attempted to explain sweating and capitalism from a socialist perspective. Poems are not polemical essays, yet these socialist poems can be seen as political tracts. They use similar techniques to public speeches: repetition of ideas in different forms, simplification of ideas and a personal approach in speaking to workers. Indeed, the poems were read out in political meetings. They are forthright and do not shy away from criticising the worker.

One of Winchevsky's techniques drew on generalised 'types', such as contrasting narratives that focused on polar opposites of 'rich' and 'poor'. The rich are shown as corrupt and heartless, squandering resources for their own pleasure. The poor are portrayed as downtrodden and, more often than not, ignorant. The poem 'Tsum Arbayer fraynd' seeks to explain the inequality wrought from the split between worker and master, between production and consumption. It asks, and answers, the question: Who owns the fruits of one's labour? The poem describes workers *who sacrifice their brain for their body*, and questions who benefits from it. Those:

*Vos neyen un trogn aley nite di kleyder,  
vos boyen far andere hayzer mit mi,  
un voynen aley nite in a finstern kheyder,  
tsuzamengeshtopt, vi in shtaln di fi;*

Who sew but do not wear the clothes themselves,  
Who labour to build houses for others,  
And live alone in a dark room,  
Stuffed together like cattle in stalls;

*vos horeven nur, um tsu makhn di gvirn  
alts raykher durkh dem, vos dem oremen  
felt,  
un lozn zikh kirevn, traybn un firn,  
vi oksn in sokhe, vi oksn in feld.*

Who only work to make the rich  
Even richer through that which the poor worker  
lacks,  
And submit to being steered, driven and led  
Like oxen in the plough, like oxen in the field.<sup>57</sup>

The theme is a standard socialist axiom which Winchevsky repeated many times as if to reinforce the idea. In another thirteen stanza poem, 'Tsu di arbayer: nokh a tsuruf' (To the Worker: Another Call), around half the verses tell the same message repeated in different ways: sewing clothes another will wear while the worker goes naked, sowing seeds for others' food while the worker starves and the workers' sweat giving the wealthy wine.

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<sup>57</sup> Winchevsky, 'Tsum arbayer fraynd', *Freiheit*, 1905, 10-11 (dated 1885).

These poems offer a theoretical perspective on workers' alienation that is a partial explanation, or a step in understanding a Marxist idea. By using the standard tropes of the movement Winchevsky's verse was part of a wider poetic tradition. Ruth Rubin traced the theme of workers creating and producing what they cannot own in a number of Yiddish, German and American poems, all taking their inspiration from Shelley's 'Song to the Men of England', written in 1819. Rubin quotes 'Tsu di arbayer' as an example, seeing Winchevsky as 'the most versatile' of the Sweatshop Poets.<sup>58</sup>

Winchevsky also used poems to admonish workers for their passivity. 'Tsu di arbayer', for instance, moves beyond the explanation of an idea to urge workers to be pro-active in changing the situation:

*Dokh ir kvart un dart  
un derlangt zikh keyn rir;  
farblendet, farnart,  
ot zitst ir un vart,  
zogt, oyf vemen vart ir?*

Here you shrivel up and wither  
And do not stir yourself;  
Deluded, fooled,  
You just sit and wait,  
Speak, who are you waiting for?<sup>59</sup>

The reprimands are taken further in 'Moyre Shkhoyre' (Depression) which offers an explanation of how workers make the tools of their oppression, and ends up blaming the worker:

*Di fabrikantn lozn aykh on kreftn...  
Fun ayer dumheynt makhn zey gesheftn...*

The manufacturers leave you without a skill...  
They make businesses from your stupidity...

*Ir shmit aleynt far ayer guf di keynt,  
ir flekht aleynt far ayer haldz di shtrik;  
ir helft aleynt far zikh dem nets farshpreytn,  
ir boyt aleynt dem fangers festn brik.*

You forge the chains for your own body,  
You braid the rope for your own neck;  
You help spread the net for yourself,  
You yourself build the capturer's firm bridge.<sup>60</sup>

The consumers in these poems may be a variety of people, yet all of them are *raykhe* (rich). Winchevsky attempted over and over to define the two sides: them and us, masters and workers. The poem 'Vi di raykhe layt lebn' (How the Rich Live) runs to 48 verses. His six-line descriptions of rich peoples' lives are vignettes, glances that build up to an understanding of the other side. The rich include an elegantly dressed flatterer, a traveller squandering his money on happiness, a journalist of sleaze, a banker's gambling son, a hypocritical preacher and a corrupt lawyer. The descriptions of the rich

<sup>58</sup> Ruth Rubin, 'History of an American Yiddish Folk Song', *Jewish Quarterly* Autumn (1954): 151–60.

<sup>59</sup> Winchevsky, 'Tsu di arbayer', *AF*, 27 February 1891.

<sup>60</sup> Winchevsky, 'Moyre shkhoyre', *FV*, September 1892.

show their hypocrisy, and because they are rich they can gamble and womanise and patronise balls and concerts. The poem's first vignette describes a rich man who became rich through the path of upward mobility from worker to master (sweater) to usurer:

*Eyner iz a sveterl  
biz er vert a feterl  
un layt gelt oyf protsent;  
layt gelt ruik zitsendik,  
rokhendik, nit shvitsendik,  
vi frier arbetse-hent.*

One is a sweater  
Until he becomes a pawnbroker  
And lends money for interest;  
Lends money calmly sitting,  
Smoking, not perspiring,  
Like [he did] earlier [with his] worker's hands.<sup>61</sup>

For the socialist Winchevsky, workers had to remain workers and fight as workers. If they became masters, they had abandoned the fight and become traitors, the enemy, the rich. Winchevsky stressed the importance of being a worker, and the dignity of having real work from your own hands.

The dignity of work was a theme that emerged in a number of poems. The poem 'Akhdes' (Unity), which will be analysed in detail in chapter six, has a strong local flavour. It is an ironical description of the lack of unity in the London Jewish community. It sets up supposed unities which are really disunities. There is one reference in the poem to the importance of work:

*Yo mir zaynen ale eynik!  
...  
Say mir shnaydn pantalones,  
say mir shnayden op kupones.*

Yes we are all united!  
...  
Whether we are cutting trousers,  
Or whether we are cutting out coupons.<sup>62</sup>

This couplet contrasts two ways of making money: working in the tailoring trade within the sweating system, or cutting coupons. The coupons most likely refer to charity coupons given by the Jewish Board of Guardians in preference to cash handouts.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, it could refer to both. The Board of Guardians' charity work was not seen in a positive light by the socialists who wanted to inculcate the idea of revolution by workers identifying as workers, with one's living coming from the dignity of work. Whichever use of the word *kupones*, the poem argues that ways of making money are

<sup>61</sup> Winchevsky, 'Vi di raykhe layt lebn', *Veker*, 1892–3. The words 'sweater' and 'pawnbroker' are in the diminutive form, adding irony to the meaning. The meaning of the last line is ambiguous. I have translated it to mean his own hands, but they could be the hands of other workers.

<sup>62</sup> Winchevsky, 'Akhdes', *AF*, 29 August 1890.

<sup>63</sup> In 1897 the Board of Guardians abolished the system of coupons in favour of cash. Lipman, *Social History*, 117. The reference may also have overtones of coupons used in the Stock Exchange.

not equal. The message of the dignity of work was so important to Winchevsky he used it as the front motto of the *Poylishe yidl*, in a quote from Psalm 128: *Yegiya kapekho ki soykhel ashrekho vetoyv lokh* (When you enjoy the fruits of your own labour you will be happy and prosper). In the first edition of the *Poylishe yidl* in 1884, Winchevsky's editorial explained the motto as the *raison d'être* of the newspaper. It argued that when the *Poylishe yidl* would become a paper that the workers would be proud to call their own: 'Then we will hold the awl, the needle, the plane and the hammer in more esteem than the scissors that cut the coupons.'<sup>64</sup>

Later in the same year the *Poylishe yidl* published Winchevsky's poem 'A khoydesh on arbayt' (A Month without Work), which begins:

<p><i>Ikh bet nit nedoves fun vegn zkhush-oves, farhoreven vil ikh mayn broyt. Nit betlen, nit shnoren, tsu ktsinim nit forn, nit vartn oyf raykhe layts toyt... Mayn shtolts iz mayn handverk aleyen.</i></p>	<p>I ask for no charity For the merits of the fathers, I will work for my bread. Not beg, not plead I will not go to a rich man I will not wait for a rich man to die... My pride is my handiwork alone.<sup>65</sup></p>
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The *merits of the fathers*, in this context, means the luck of being born a Jew, because it was only Jewish workers who could partake of the charitable support from the Jewish Board of Guardians, that is, getting coupons. In his memoirs, Winchevsky described how he came to write the poem 'A khoydesh on arbayt'. Coming out of a meeting in Whitechapel at one o'clock in the morning, he saw the effect of the slack time, which left workers unemployed and hungry. Outside the meeting there were beggars:

People who lick rich peoples' plates, who assume that their poverty is a natural phenomenon.... Their remedy for the 'slack' is going to the Board of Guardians.... With boys coming over having to work for London sweaters, never having been an artisan back home, it's easy for them to fall into being a beggar. One has to get them from the beginning, to feel the importance of work and the lowliness of begging.<sup>66</sup>

The word *handiwork* in the poem is written in anglicised Yiddish, and emphasised the fact that the debates around productivity and taking pride in physical work were taking place in English socialist circles too.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Editorial, *PY*, July 1884.

<sup>65</sup> Winchevsky, 'A khoydesh on arbayt', *PY*, 31 October 1884.

<sup>66</sup> Winchevsky, *Erinerungen*, 261.

<sup>67</sup> At the time Winchevsky was writing there was debate between William Morris and Oscar Wilde: Morris arguing for an aesthetics of labour and Wilde sceptical about the talk of the dignity of manual

Winchevsky's poems may have been trying to explain socialist politics in sound-bites, yet they are powerful. They have rhythmic momentum and memorable phrases. The poems attempt to give the workers pride in themselves, an understanding of their situation and a desire to change it. However, Winchevsky was facing the mass of workers who were exhausted, indifferent to politics and often religious.

***Rabiner un mashiner: religious cobwebs***

Winchevsky had learned a lesson from the fate of his predecessor and inspiration, the socialist agitator Aaron Liberman. Liberman had been too uncompromising for the London immigrants, offending and alienating them with his fiercely anti-clerical stance and angry rhetoric which reduced his effect as a political activist.<sup>68</sup> Another of Winchevsky's tactics, then, was to take a more diplomatic, though no less critical approach from his predecessor: although fiercely anti-religious himself he used his knowledge of Jewish theological texts, concepts and practice to put across political points.<sup>69</sup>

The context was complex. Many young anarchists would tease and antagonise religious workers, provoking them by smoking demonstratively on the Sabbath outside East End synagogues and noisily attending annual Yom Kippur balls.<sup>70</sup> Even less religious workers felt their religion being profaned and this caused greater hatred between the religious and the radical left. Historian Nora Levin argues that the guilt Jewish workers felt from being forced to work on the Sabbath was aggravated by the 'vulgar public assaults' of the anarchists. Instead, the socialists 'stressed the opposition of science to religious dogmas and the need to educate the masses in the history of religion and evolution.'<sup>71</sup> Winchevsky himself criticised the orthodox establishments for class exploitation and corruption and condemned religious theology and practice as superstition or inequitable. But he was also pragmatic, seeing winning workers to the socialist cause as more important than the anarchist pranks. He aimed for the first step of engaging workers in labour politics so that they identify as workers with the workers'

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labour. Livesey, *Culture of Aestheticism*, 38–9. Livesey bases her argument on Wilde's *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891), Morris' 'aesthetic continuum', *News from Nowhere* (1890). Also Gerald Manley Hopkins' poem *Harry Ploughman* was published in 1887.

<sup>68</sup> See Frankel, *Prophecy*, 31–41; Rocker and Ward, *London Years*, 57–65; Fishman, *Radicals*, 114–24.

<sup>69</sup> Levin, *Jewish Socialist Movements*, 132.

<sup>70</sup> *JC*, 23 September 1904; Feldman, *Englishmen*, 335.

<sup>71</sup> Levin, *Jewish Socialist Movements*, 133.

struggle, anticipating that political conviction would expel religious practice in due course.

One way of doing this was using language that workers could understand and drew on tradition. Bik argues that ‘this was not some intellectual cult of biblical themes, it was about using the religious terminology as a way of requisitioning workers to revolutionary ideas. In this way Winchevsky requisitioned the biblical language for his own use in his muse.’<sup>72</sup> Indeed, just as the byline for the *Poylishe yidl* was from the Psalms, the by-line for the *Arbayter fraynd* was a phrase from the legendary rabbi Hillel: ‘If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I?’<sup>73</sup> This famous religious text, became a socialist tract in their hands, partly highlighting the possibility that there were points of common philosophy, but also using it to show that socialism was the true religion. Winchevsky may have inhabited an atheist and deeply anti-religious stance but it did not lead him to abandon religious concepts that were helpful in promoting the socialist cause.

Winchevsky singled out the Anglo-Jewish rabbinate for criticism and satire. His assault had less to do with religion and more to do with privilege, class, authority, paternalism and control. Winchevsky attempted to show that inequality was linked to corruption within the system and abuse of religious authority, and that the Anglo-Jewish clerics always took the side of masters and exploiters. This gave the socialists and the workers a common target. The immigrants saw Anglo-Jewish orthodoxy as too lax and the *Jewish Chronicle* regularly campaigned against *khadorim* and *khevres*.<sup>74</sup> So Winchevsky’s antagonism with Anglo-Jewish religious authority in his poems opened a door for orthodox immigrants to feel a part of the workers’ struggle. Winchevsky’s barbs echoed their own annoyance, and they could see Winchevsky as fighting against the type of religion that they were also against.

In the satirical poem ‘Rabiner un mashiner: A kontrast’ (Rabbi and Machinist [tailor]: A contrast) the rabbi represents the Anglo-Jewish rabbinate of the United Synagogue,

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<sup>72</sup> Bik, *Troymer, kemfer*, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Rabbi Hillel *Pirkei Avos* 1:14. Hillel (110BC-10AD), one of the most influential rabbis in Jewish history in the development of the Talmud.

<sup>74</sup> Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, 76.

described as rich, lazy, working with words and earning well.<sup>75</sup> The tailor represented the immigrant worker who, by contrast, struggled to make in a year what the rabbi earned in a month, labouring with his hands, making what the rabbi used. Three middle verses of the ten-verse poem run:

*Ikh bin a mashiner,  
du bist a rabiner —  
du handlst mit got,  
on zorg, on khlapot;  
dayn eyntsike skhoyre  
iz dayn bisl toyre,  
ven ikh zits un shtep,  
farukt in a sklep...*

I am a machinist,  
You are a rabbi —  
You do business with God,  
Without worry, without toil,  
Your only merchandise  
Is your bit of Torah,  
While I sit and [machine] stitch  
Bent over in a cellar...

*Du bist a rabiner,  
ikh bin a mashiner —  
ven ikh zol zayn foyl,  
ken ikh mit mayn moyl  
nit makhn a lebn  
mir vet men nit gebn  
mit mayn sheyn geshtalt  
vi dir groys gehalt.*

You are a rabbi,  
I am a machinist —  
If I am lazy,  
I cannot make a living  
With my words.  
I will not be given wages  
For my fine spirit  
As you are for yours.

*Du bist a rabiner,  
ikh bin a mashiner —  
ikh arbet—du zogst,  
ikh makh—du farmogst;  
du paskest a shayle  
un lernst a vayle;  
du shpilst zikh—ikh zorg,  
du layst gelt, ikh borg.*

You are a rabbi,  
I am a machinist —  
I work—you talk,  
I create—you own;  
You solve a religious problem  
And study [Torah] for a while;  
You play—I worry,  
You lend money, I borrow.<sup>76</sup>

This poem addresses themes that Winchevsky repeatedly used: poverty, the nature of productivity, the worth of physical work and the inequality of ownership. However, these themes did not usually include a religious element. In ‘Rabiner un mashiner’ the image of the rabbi posits rabbinical authority in the class hierarchy of the rich and as an exploiter of the worker. The rabbi of his poem was a symbol of the privilege of the rabbinate, which set it as a class apart from the working tailor. Each of the ten verses exposes different aspects of inequality brought on by class difference, contrasting food, homes and clothing. But in particular the poem depicts the indifference, or even ignorance, of the rabbi to the tailor’s plight. This class difference pitted the Anglo-Jewish orthodox against the immigrant worker: secular or religious. Religious workers

<sup>75</sup> The Yiddish word *rabiner*, was used to refer to the German rabbinate, and so, by extension, the Anglo-Jewish rabbinate. Rabbis from the immigrant orthodox community were generally called *rebe* or *rov*.

<sup>76</sup> Winchevsky, ‘Rabiner un mashiner: A kontrast’, *AF*, 17 August 1888.



were equally affected by hardship and many were involved in union action. Geoffrey Alderman describes how small *khevres* would double up as meeting places for socialist and union meetings. He argues that many orthodox Jews did not see a conflict between praying in a *khevre* and going to socialist meetings, and that although the Jewish masses did not subscribe to socialism *en-masse*, it was still seen as ‘a framework for industrial organization.’<sup>77</sup>

‘Rabiner un mashiner’ was likely to have been written in response to the ongoing debate about the nature of the sweating system and the role of immigrant labour. In March 1888 John Burnett, Labour Correspondent of the Board of Trade, brought out a report on sweating in the East End tailoring trade. Amid the report’s analysis of sweating as a system and the function of immigrant labour, he described the appalling conditions for workers in sweated workshops.<sup>78</sup> These conditions were condemned by Anglican and Catholic primates, and Jewish socialists agitated for the Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler to follow suit. He refused, dismissing the dreadful working conditions as an exaggeration. The *Arbayter fraynd* then decried him as an ally of the sweaters.<sup>79</sup> Unrest over labour conditions in the immigrant trades came to a head with the ‘Synagogue Parade’ in 1889. On this tumultuous occasion hundreds of Jewish workers marched to the Great Synagogue in Houndsditch, on the fringes of the City of London and bordering the East End, where Hermann Adler was going to deliver a sermon to the unemployed and sweated labour.<sup>80</sup> In response to socialist demands for an eight-hour day, Adler mocked the East End workers by suggesting that he worked harder than they did and was also utterly exhausted by his toil.<sup>81</sup>

Winchevsky’s poem, far from alienating religious immigrants, included them as workers. The religious immigrant workers were unlikely to have identified with the *rabiner* of the poem since the Anglo-Jewish United Synagogue was not fighting their

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<sup>77</sup> Alderman, *Federation of Synagogues*, 14–15.

<sup>78</sup> The report related the decline of the skilled English craftsman to subcontracting by Jewish middlemen, leading to thousands of destitute Jewish immigrants working in sweating conditions. Sheila Blackburn, *A Fair Day’s Wage for a Fair Day’s Work?: Sweated Labour and the Origins of Minimum Wage Legislation in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 44. This analysis was contested by sociologists Beatrice Potter and David Schloss who were concerned to contradict the link between the middleman subcontractor and sweating conditions. Feldman, *Englishmen*, 187.

<sup>79</sup> The *AF* made connections between sweaters, capitalists and the Anglo-Jewish religious leaders. The Chief Rabbi was abused as someone who ‘believes in the sweating system more than God’, and honorary officers of East End synagogues were called ‘sweaters’. *AF*, 2–9 March 1888. Quoted in Feldman, *Englishmen*, 133.

<sup>80</sup> Pollins, *Economic History*, 157.

<sup>81</sup> *JC*, 22 February 1889, 6–7.

battles. Indeed, the poem cleverly gave the religious immigrants no real choice since they were hardly likely to think of themselves as middle-class orthodox Anglo-Jews and hence, notwithstanding their religiosity, were forced to place themselves in the ranks of the immigrant working class. The poem criticised class difference and corruption within religious hierarchy, yet did not argue against an individual's religious beliefs.

However, there was also attack on immigrant religious structures. Winchevsky criticised the ideas and modes of behaviour in the immigrant *khevres*. He saw them, too, as places of inequality, where status could be conferred by virtue of pedigree rather than hard work, and so passed over impoverished immigrant workers who did not have that status. The fourth verse of the poem 'A khoydesh on arbayt', analysed in the previous section, uses religious terminology to portray inequality in the synagogue system of 'honours'.

*Ikh bet nit keyn shlishi,  
keyn maftir, keyn shishi,  
ikh vil nit in mizrekh vant shteyn.*

I don't ask for a *shlishi*  
No *maftir* no *shishi*  
I don't want to stand at the eastern wall.<sup>82</sup>

This meaning of this verse would have been transparent to Jews with the sort of solid religious education common to immigrants from Russia and Poland. The terms *shlishi* (third), *shishi* (sixth) and *maftir* (concluding) denote sections of Torah reading on a Sabbath or holy day when a member of the congregation is given an 'honour' by being called up to the Torah to pronounce a blessing prior to and after the recitation of the passage. There are usually seven sections plus the *maftir*, with the three honours mentioned in the poem considered the most important. Anyone honoured was expected to make a donation to the synagogue (*shnoder*), and the amount of donation was announced to the congregation. Thus to merit the distinction of the most important honours, a person would have to be wealthy enough to give a significant sum of money to the synagogue.<sup>83</sup> Respect was also given by preferential seating. The reference to the *mizrekh vant* referred to the wall at the front of the synagogue, facing east towards Jerusalem, and near the ark containing the torah scrolls. Seats there were reserved for the most respected synagogue members and officials, those who held authority in the community. Indeed, these were the people who would determine who received honours.

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<sup>82</sup> Winchevsky, 'A khoydesh on arbayt'.

<sup>83</sup> Oberman went to considerable lengths to gain respect in his *khevre* by *shnodering* a higher sum for his *aliye* than would be expected for the honour. Oberman, *In mayne teg*, 116–7.

A poor tailor sitting at the back of the *khevre*, earning barely enough to support his family, would have been excluded from this honours system even though he was as devout and deserving as wealthy members of the community.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, Winchevsky's poem gives dignity to the worker who is not taking part in synagogue hierarchies and politics.

Winchevsky's use of religious language shows insider knowledge of religious structures, but, more importantly, suggests where socialist principles needed to be arrayed against those religious structures that upheld inequality. In this way, Winchevsky crafted a space where the politically concerned religious immigrant worker could relate socialist thought to a religious context, maybe not convincing enough to induce the reader or hearer to abandon religious practice (as the author hoped), yet sufficient to extend the borders of inclusivity within a very broad left.

### ***Notitsn: transform the world***

Winchevsky's poetry that focused on English politics can be seen to be a direct attempt to encourage engagement with life in England. One of the stated aims of the *Polylishe yidl* was 'to give readers an idea of what's going on in the world.'<sup>85</sup> Although this may seem obvious for a newspaper, editors were always trying to find better ways of doing this. *Arbayter fraynd* editor Philip Krantz, in an attempt to increase readership, instituted a column called *notitsn* (notes). This column concentrated on topical politics, and was written in short concise paragraphs. Krantz hoped that shorter articles would be more accessible and draw the reader in more quickly than longer articles. The writer of the *notitsn* column was Winchevsky.<sup>86</sup> However, Winchevsky was a 'journalist in verse' and, by the time the *notitsn* were published in the monthly *Fraye velt*, Winchevsky had included a verse to the prose *notitsn*.<sup>87</sup> The verses, sometimes short and concise, and sometimes longer than the prose paragraph, created an additional perspective, and although connected to the prose, stood alone as poems. The poems were eye catching and accessible and tended to encapsulate the nugget of an event, often with a satirical edge in pithy and memorable couplets. They added sentiment and often humour to the argument to create a different type of contribution to the debate.

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<sup>84</sup> This system of honours was also in place in Anglo-Jewish synagogues.

<sup>85</sup> Editorial, *PY*, 25 July 1884, 1–2.

<sup>86</sup> Winchevsky considered that short clear paragraphs would increase accessibility to the ideas and therefore be a 'good medium to awaken the masses.' Winchevsky, *Erinerungen*, 207, 211.

<sup>87</sup> The term 'journalist in verse' comes from Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, *World of Our Fathers* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 425.

Around half the poetic *notitsn* concerned British politics and half of them were news from abroad, often those countries the Yiddish-speaking immigrants had come from. One *notits* was in the form of a conversation between ‘Alexander the idiot’ and ‘Wilhelm the insane’ (Tsar Alexander III and German Emperor Wilhelm). Others included an angry piece on the death of ‘the swine’ Moltke the Elder, the sad love life of the son of the Romanian king, a death notice for the Chilean president and a piece mocking Bismarck. This section will only concentrate on the *notitsn* concerning British politics, those which alluded to a connection to the immigrant Jews of Whitechapel.

A *notits* of May 1891 gave an opinion on the national census of the previous month. The prose section argued that the census collection only counted heads because it was convenient. Had they counted the sufferings of those heads it would have produced an altogether different statistic. The poem followed a similar line of argument:

<p><i>Zey tseyln di kep, ale tsen yor amol, tsu visn oyf klor fun di mentshn dem tsol, vos voynen in dize gebentshte medine; zey tseylen di kep, on a shum nafke-mine, tsu zaynen di aynvoyner zat, oder nit, oykh hertser tsubrokhene tseylen zey nit.</i></p>	<p>They count heads every ten years, To know precisely the number of people, Who live in this blessed country; They count heads without differentiating, Whether the inhabitants are satisfied, or not, And they do not count broken hearts.<sup>88</sup></p>
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The poem is not a journalist’s report, it is comment, and, as such, participates in discussion rather than in giving information. The highly rhythmic poem has clear and clever rhymes both mid-line and end-of-line, offering a mnemonic. It seems designed for reading aloud. The punch line gives it an emotional edge missing from the prose section.

Another *notits* responded to the Elementary Education Act of 1891, which offered grants to schools so that parents would not have to pay directly for schooling. Winchevsky was critical of this measure, seeing it as a surreptitious way to raise taxes:

The government throws down a bone; free schools. The workers’ children finally get free schools and universities. The English worker will be in the same happy position as the Jew in Whitechapel.<sup>89</sup> He will lose the few pennies a week that could have been earned. The [government] money [to make free schools] comes from the 90 million pounds they tear out annually from the people. This [the

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<sup>88</sup> *FV*, May 1891. Note that none of the *notitsn* have titles.

<sup>89</sup> This refers to the Jewish community already being able to get free schooling from Jewish schools such as the Jews’ Free School.

workers'] money comes from the extra bits a family would have saved for their children's education. 'What a swindle the whole story is.'<sup>90</sup>

The verse that followed is written in the style of a playground song to be chanted while skipping rope:

<i>Zey gibn a peni un nemen a pund, ir zayt di bal-khoyves, un zey di bal-toyves. Zey gibn aykh makes un nemen gezond.</i>	They give a penny and take a pound, You are the debtor, And they, the benefactor. They beat you, and take your health. <sup>91</sup>
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Although the prose carries more detail, the poem, as well as standing alone, extends the argument, pitting the government against parents in a similar way to pitting master against worker. Writing the piece in the form of a skipping song put the child at the centre of the debate. This law affecting all parents was shown to affect the immigrant community and demanded that immigrant parents respond to the English world they are a part of.

Interesting the worker in general British politics may have been a first step towards engaging the worker in progressive politics. Winchevsky's practical yet profoundly radical attitude is exemplified in a short *notits* of July 1892 concerning the upcoming British general election:

<i>Der liberale zogt, dzhek muz im helfn, vayl er iz zayn fraynd. Der konservator zogt: mayn buzem efnt zikh far dzhekn haynt. Bayn sheynker kumt oys, dzhek iz zayner un er lozt im nit avek. Der vaser-mentsh shrayt: ikh bin dayner un du mayner, liber dzhek! Der git im tey, der git a shnepsl yener firt im in karetn; primroz-damen kushn, gletn; un dzhek — er shtimt far zey, der shepsl.</i>	The Liberal says, Jack must help him Because he is his friend. The Conservative says: My heart Opens to Jack today. The publican contends that Jack is his And will not let him go. The teetotaler shouts: I am yours And you are mine, dear Jack! One gives him tea, another gives him a drink, Someone else leads him in carriages: The primrose-women kiss, caress; And Jack — he votes for them, the sheep. <sup>92</sup>
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The poem mocks the strategies used by different parties to court the worker to vote for them. However, nowhere in this verse does Winchevsky suggest *who* the worker should vote for. In other forums, including poems, Winchevsky did not hold back from telling

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<sup>90</sup> *FV*, August-September 1891.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *FV*, July 1892. Primrose-women were members of the Primrose League, an organization set up in 1883 to campaign for the Conservatives.

the worker what to think and chiding the worker for not thinking at all. Yet here he merely goads the worker *to* think, and challenges the worker to think independently. The humour in the satirical final line assumes that the worker would not want to be taunted as a ‘sheep’, and that this stinging accusation would be enough of a motivation to get them to think seriously. It was not a very subtle attempt at demanding thoughtful engagement with politics, but it was in line with Winchevsky’s non-partisan position, to demand engagement, but not specify where on the spectrum to engage.<sup>93</sup>

The three *notitsn* analysed above had direct relevance for the Jews of Whitechapel who had just filled in the census, were sending their children to school or were about to vote in the coming elections (those who could). These three events in English politics included the Jewish immigrant population or at least some of them. Winchevsky, as an internationalist, desired integration and, indeed, assimilation, and so encouraged fighting within English politics rather than being segregated as a Jewish community.

There were also *notitsn* that did not necessarily have a Jewish angle, except under Winchevsky’s pen. One *notits* concerned the Baccarat affair. Rather than condemning Prince Bertie’s connection to the affair and haranguing his gambling habit, Winchevsky put forward a different view:<sup>94</sup>

<p><i>Ven mentshn fun ale kulirn un sortn, vos horeven shver, mitn nodl un sher, farginen zikh gelt tsu farlirn in kortn, — varum zol a prints, velkher hot mamen mints, nit makhen a kertl un klingers farliren? Varum nit kleyn-shas take lernen tsum shpas, un zikh nur mit vayber un sport amuziren? Dzhon bul, zey nit shtum, zog, entfer — varum.</i></p>	<p>If people of all colours and sorts, Who work hard with needle and scissors, Let themselves lose money at cards, — Why should a prince, who has mother’s money, Not have a game of cards and lose cash? Why not study cards for fun, And amuse oneself with women and sport? John Bull, do not be silent. Speak, answer — why.<sup>95</sup></p>
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This *notits* used a number of layers to the satire. On one level the poem contends that as people who cannot afford to gamble away their money, do so, why shouldn’t someone gamble who can afford it? Of course this is ironic, but Winchevsky did not lose an opportunity to harangue the Jewish workers on their gambling habits. In this *notits* there is a carefully crafted way that the poem draws in the Yiddish-speaker, which is Winchevsky’s choice of the word *kleyn-shas* to mean a deck of cards. There are other

<sup>93</sup> Many immigrant workers would not have had the vote as they were not naturalised citizens.

<sup>94</sup> Edward, second child and eldest son of Victoria and Albert, was nicknamed ‘Bertie’.

<sup>95</sup> *FV*, July 1891.

terms Winchevsky could have used in Yiddish to mean cards (*kartn, dek*), but this is a very *Jewish* term because it literally means ‘little Talmud’.<sup>96</sup> This subtle use of the term directed the criticism, not only at Bertie (who would have more likely played *kartn*), but at gambling Jews playing *kleyn-shas*. In this way, Winchevsky subtly connects English issues with the Jewish street, putting Jewish immigrants into the English mainstream. Putting Jews into an English picture also makes Jewish behaviour just the same as English behaviour, encouraging an anglicised viewpoint.

One of the most significant *notitsn* displays Winchevsky’s anxiety about what he terms anti-Semitism.<sup>97</sup> Winchevsky had been writing poems about anti-Jewish journalism and activity since 1884, writing that Marmor described as ‘alarmist’.<sup>98</sup> The poem ‘Rikblik oyf dos alte yor’ (A Glance at the Old Year) was written in September 1884 to coincide with the Jewish New Year, Winchevsky tried to persuade the reader to let the old year go because it has only brought misery. It conjures images of Torquemada and Haman, arguing that the nineteenth century is doing just as badly with the Tiszaeszlár blood libel and pogroms.<sup>99</sup> In a prose piece also from 1884, ‘A kleyne volkn oyfn himl’, Winchevsky declared that ‘a pogrom in Brick Lane, in the crossroad of Commercial Road could be terrible and bloody... like a pogrom in the Baltic.’<sup>100</sup> He repeatedly called Jews ‘stepchildren’ in the countries that already have emancipation as well as those that do not.<sup>101</sup> In July 1891, one *notits* deplored the ‘anti-Semitic’ stance of two newspapers:

the two papers that have exploited the lie the most, that have shouted about it more than others; that this country will be attacked by Jews; who have thundered more than any others, that England NOW has already got more Jews than is healthy for it,—these newspapers both belong... to JEWS. These anti-Semitic Jewish papers

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<sup>96</sup> Gambling is forbidden in Jewish law, except on the festivals of Hanukkah and Purim where one plays cards and dice instead of studying Talmud. So the term *kleyn-shas* (literally meaning little Talmud), is used for a deck of cards. Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008), 234–5. The term *kleyn-shas* gives the playing cards the status of a commandment. In addition, one *lernt* (studies) Talmud, and ends up ‘*lernen kleyn-shas*’, studying cards rather than playing them.

<sup>97</sup> Winchevsky uses the term ‘anti-Semitism’, which was a new term in England in the 1880s. It was a contested term. Arnold White attempted to manipulate public opinion by diminishing the negative power of the term. He suggested it was an old eternal word, thus allowing race to be brought into discussions of immigration and poverty. Glover, *Literature, Immigration*, 82–6.

<sup>98</sup> Marmor, *Lebn*, 103–4.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas de Torquemada was the leader of the Spanish inquisition, and Haman is the (fictional) villain of the Purim story who attempted to kill the Jews of Persia. *PY*, 26 September 1884. The Tiszaeszlár Affair of 1882–3 was a trial for blood libel in Austria which led to anti-Semitic pogroms.

<sup>100</sup> *PY*, 3 October 1884. The corner of Brick Lane and Commercial Road was the central thoroughfare of Jewish Whitechapel.

<sup>101</sup> Marmor, *Lebn*, 104.

are—the “Telegraph” of Levy-Lawson and *The Evening News* of Harry Marks. If this is not a scandal what is it? <sup>102</sup>

The naming and shaming of the prose is followed by a chilling interpretation in verse:

*Ven england zol di tir farshlissn  
far di, vos zey faryogt der knut,  
un oyb dos folk zol hir fargissn,  
farblendet, umshuldikes blut,—  
dan blaybt dem yidn in vaytshepl  
oyf yedn fal nokh diser troyst,  
az ale kumt fun a yidel's kepel,  
den levi yogt un marks farshtoyst.*

If England would lock the door  
On those, who have been chased with whips,  
And if the people here should blindly  
Spill innocent blood,—  
Then the Jews in Whitechapel will still have,  
In any case, this one consolation,  
That everything comes from inside a Jew's head,  
Because Levy chases away and Marks banishes.<sup>103</sup>

Generally, Winchevsky showed the economic reasons behind anti-Semitism. On one side he pointed at Jewish financiers and exploiters, condemning them as the reason why Jewish workers were hated. On the other side he pointed towards non-unionised Jewish workers under-cutting union gains in pay deals. His solutions are two-fold, one was for Jewish workers to move out of densely populated Jewish areas, join unions and work together with English workers. The other was to expose in the papers all incidents either of rich Jews exploiting non-Jewish workers or of any acts committed against the Jewish community or an individual.<sup>104</sup>

The *notitsn* demanded engagement with the English world. Winchevsky does not (here) suggest that Jews have to convert or move away from orthodox religious practice. Indeed, he takes a Jewish angle on the English news, and in this way pushes an acculturation rather than an assimilation agenda. Yet he is suggesting that working with English people is the way forward.

### ***In di gasn, tsu di masn: an inspired song***

The poems by Winchevsky that stood the test of time were poems put to music and sung on union demonstrations. The power of song, the memory of a melody and the feeling it brings to a chorus of protesters may have added piquancy and immediacy to the message contained within it.

The connection between music and modes of conduct is analysed by Tia DeNora arguing that music in public spaces is ‘a powerful medium of social order.... To be in

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<sup>102</sup> *FV*, July 1891.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> For Winchevsky's views on anti-Semitism, see Marmor, *Lebn*, 103–7.



control, then, of the soundtrack of social action is to provide a framework for the organisation of social agency.’ She refers to played music rather than song, however this theory may be applied to sung music by protesting crowds. The music is both participatory and heard by others. It provides the background to the protest and a way of actively engaging in a communal form of action.<sup>105</sup> Martin Stokes’ recent research concerns the nature of music in crowds which come together with a common purpose. He describes ‘emotional contagion’ brought on by the ‘force of an idea.’ He argues that sound is ‘integral’ to events, from the noise of feet marching and dancing to mass singing.<sup>106</sup> Mervyn Busted argues that for migrant groups, if songs contain ideas about group identity, then ‘The mere act of singing, or simply humming the tune individually or in group context, is in itself an act of resistance.’<sup>107</sup> Winchevsky’s poems, written as acts of resistance and protest for the Yiddish-speaking workers, can be seen as providing the background sounds to the struggle. They can be seen as creating a framework and a way of understanding the fight for better working conditions.

The mid-to-late 1880s were busy with union activity, strikes and marches. William Morris was publishing poems in *Commonweal*, the journal of the Socialist League (SL). Morris was writing poems to be sung on marches and for entertainment at the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and SL events and was beginning to build up a collection of socialist activist songs.<sup>108</sup> Similar chants and songs were needed in Yiddish for immigrant marches and events which Winchevsky provided. In London the SDF and SL would sing to William Morris’ lyrics, and from London to New York protesting crowds would sing to Winchevsky’s Yiddish lyrics. Winchevsky wrote in response to the need for specific union protests and demonstrations. He was not standing on the sidelines but involved in the activism, writing for the Yiddish press, encouraging workers to join unions, being a part of English socialist activism.

Winchevsky wrote all of his poetry in rhyming couplets, and a sung version was the most common introduction for the worker to Winchevsky’s poetry. Russian mechanic and Socialist writer Peysakh Novik described the first time he heard a poem by

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<sup>105</sup> Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16–17.

<sup>106</sup> Martin Stokes, ‘Music, Affect and Political Action’ (Lecture, Royal Holloway, 5 February 2013).

<sup>107</sup> Mervyn Busted, ‘Songs in a Strange Land—ambiguities of Identity amongst Irish Migrants in Mid-Victorian Manchester’, *Political Geography* 17, no. 6 (1998): 600–1.

<sup>108</sup> Nicholas Salmon, ‘The Communist Poet-Laureate: William Morris’s “Chants for Socialists”’, *Journal of the William Morris Society* 14 (2001): 31, 37–8. These songs were collected and published as *Chants for Socialists*.

Winchevsky. He was working in a factory in Brisk (Belarus) and he heard the factory girls singing a song about the London newspaper, the *Arbayter fraynd*:

<i>Vos traybn di reder fun ale mashinen, vos akern, zayen un baken di broyt, un kenen fundestvegn broyt nit gefinen, ven slek oder krankheyt zey shtirtst in a noyt.</i>	Who drives the wheels of every machine, Who ploughs, sows and bakes the bread, And nevertheless cannot find any bread, When slack or sickness fall into need. <sup>109</sup>
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Neither Novik nor the workers knew the song was written by Winchevsky, and they may only have known about the London Yiddish newspaper through the song's title. Novik was struck by the effect of the group singing:

The tune was haunting, solemn and haunting. The machines knocked and the song carried, demanded and punished and welcomed the *Arbayter fraynd*. . . . I heard this song many times in the factories. It was sung heartily and with feeling. At times a factory girl would get a tear in her eye. But after they finished singing the atmosphere, that was continuously oppressive, would simply become cleansed.<sup>110</sup>

Socialist writer A. Litvak was so uplifted after hearing this song also sung by factory girls, he wrote down the words as they sang them. Before knowing the author, he wondered why the song had such power when it was just 'activism in rhyme'. He compared it to the energy generated from hearing workers sing repeatedly 'working from eight to eight / For six rubles a day', and concluded that it was the intensity and fervour that created the power of the song.<sup>111</sup> The 'singable' quality, the rhythmic nature and simplicity of the rhyming couplets were precisely what made them so accessible and moving to the workers.<sup>112</sup> Literary critic Shmuel Niger argued for the potential power of Winchevsky's sung verse:

The rhythm, the measured-ness, the expression of intense experience and condensed thought. For common people and for children rhythm is a game and a sort of spiritual cement, like music for dancing, that guides people, unites them and makes them into a group, a collective. It is easy to have an effect on them with processions, marches, with music, with verse and with rhythmic dancing speech. Better than writing editorials or proclamations about freedom, equality and brotherhood – it is more purposeful to sing.<sup>113</sup>

These descriptions of the act of group singing and rhythm having transformative power is significant. In an analysis of the transmission of affect, Teresa Brennan argues that

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<sup>109</sup> Winchevsky, 'Tsum arbayter fraynd', *Freiheit*, 1905. Poem dated 1885.

<sup>110</sup> Peysakh Novik, *Moris vintshevski - di lebedike traditsye (tsu zayn 100ste geboyrintog)*, *YK*, January 1957, 31.

<sup>111</sup> Litvak, 'Di rol fun der revolutsyoner lid in der arbeter-bavegung', in *Idishe literatur* Vol 1, ed. M. Levitan. Kiev: kultur lige, 1928, 322–3.

<sup>112</sup> Yiddish critic Ben Yakir saw the poetry's inherent sing-ability as 'a sign of true folk poetry.' Ben Yakir. *A lang dervartenes bukh, Di tsukunft*, February 1911, 94.

<sup>113</sup> Niger, *Moris Vintshevski: tsu zayn 70 yorikn geburtstog*. Press cutting, YIVO. Title and date missing.

atmosphere can ‘get into’ a person: ‘physically and biologically, something is present that was not there before... it was not generated solely or sometimes even in part by the individual.’ Brennan’s theory concerns the mechanism of the transmission, superseding older discredited crowd theories of hypnosis, telepathy and suggestibility. However, these older theories were in the public sphere towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>114</sup>

Winchevsky himself had a somewhat ambivalent attitude to his poetry being sung. On one hand he saw himself as a poet of song. The poem ‘Tsu di raykhe’ begins:

*Ir vundert zikh far vos ikh zing  
mit trern in di oygn  
fun layd un noyt un fun altsding...*

You wonder why I sing  
With tears in my eyes  
About suffering and need and everything...

*Ir fregt varum ikh zing amol  
a lid nit vos makht freylekh?*

You ask why I sing sometimes  
A song that doesn’t bring happiness?<sup>115</sup>

The poem implies that Winchevsky saw himself as a singer, and although he called his output *lider* (which can mean poem or song), he used the verb ‘sing’ a number of times. However, in the later poem ‘Mayne lider’ (My Poems) he had a different attitude:

*Fun yidishe verter alt-modish,  
fun eynfakhe reyde on a klang,  
fun tener oft venig melodish  
farfast ikh mayn prostn gezang.*

From out-dated Yiddish words  
From simple speech without a rhyme,  
From often unmelodious tones  
I compose my simple song.

*Dokh makh ikh di lider tsum zingen nit,  
a ziftst iz far zey harmoniye,  
darum makht nit oys oyb zey klingen nit  
un oyb iz zey felt melodiye.*

But I do not write the poems to be sung,  
A sigh is their harmony,  
So it doesn’t matter if they do not rhyme  
And if they lack melody.<sup>116</sup>

Here Winchevsky seems to insist that he is not writing song lyrics.<sup>117</sup> This poem was reproduced in the introduction to Winchevsky’s *Lider un gedikhte* where Winchevsky admitted that although he had not written the poems to be sung, ‘people did sing them and sung many of them and I must thank them because it has often given me happy

<sup>114</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1, 53–5.

<sup>115</sup> Winchevsky, ‘Tsu di raykhe’, *Tsukunft*, 6 February, 1885.

<sup>116</sup> Winchevsky, ‘Mayne lider’, *AF*, 13 February 1891.

<sup>117</sup> Sh. Zinger noticed the ‘humility’ of this poem, arguing that Winchevsky was too hard on himself, thus supporting his critics: ‘Even in this [poem] the fine rhythm of Yiddish song is apparent. They are not ‘insufficient’ and ‘unmelodic’ as he himself would have’. Zinger, *Moris vintshevski (tsu zayn hundertstn geboyrntog)*, *Der fraynd*, Sep-Oct 1956.

moments.<sup>118</sup> Despite Winchevsky's seeming ambivalence at himself as a poet of song, his poems were sung by crowds at demonstrations and rallies across the Yiddish world throughout the 1880s and 1890s.

The power of song was used in parallel to the English struggle. In 1885 William Morris wrote: 'things are going on very fast, and... my hopes of the great change coming speedily are much higher than they were a year ago.'<sup>119</sup> He wrote two songs 'The March of the Workers' and 'The Message of the March Wind' which offer hope that the time is right for hope and that things are moving on. Winchevsky, writing for the same actions as Morris, responded to this same sense of hope and penned the song 'Dray vekher' (Three Guards). The first guard is pessimistic about the world, the second believes the day will come and to hold firm, and the third feels the day is nearly here.

*Der kamf vet zayn heys,  
ober groys di baloynung;  
es vet kostn shveys,  
efsher blut oyf on shoynung.*

The fight will be heated,  
But great the reward;  
It will cost sweat,  
Maybe without sparing blood.<sup>120</sup>

In 1932, literary critic Prints had claimed that 'the *zeyde*'s political ear is strained and sensitive to every important development in the political and economic internal situation both at home and abroad.'<sup>121</sup> In Feb 1886, the English socialist 'march of the unemployed' led to two days of rioting, breaking the windows of clubs and destroying shops. In May 1886, Winchevsky was inspired by the early news of the Haymarket demonstration in Chicago and the call to Chicago workers, to arm themselves and be ready for battle for the socialist revolution. Marmor argued that the new impetus for revolutionary socialists caused great excitement about imminent change, leading Winchevsky to write 'Es rirt zikh' (It's moving).<sup>122</sup>

*Hert ir, kinder, vi es rirt zikh,  
vi es rirt zikh iber al?  
Vi der arbetsman mustirt zikh  
tsu dem kamf mit kapital?*

Have you heard, children, how it's moving,  
How it's moving everywhere?  
How the worker prepares  
For the fight against capitalism?<sup>123</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Morris Winchevsky, *LUG*, 8. Here the poem is titled *Mayne folkslider*.

<sup>119</sup> Letter from Morris to socialist activist Frederick Pickles, October 1885. Quoted in Livesey, *Culture of Aestheticism*, 45.

<sup>120</sup> Winchevsky, 'Dray vekher', *AF*, 15 November 1885.

<sup>121</sup> Prints. *Vintshevskis lider*.

<sup>122</sup> Marmor, *Lebn*, 134.

<sup>123</sup> Winchevsky, 'Es rirt zikh', *AF*, 12 December 1886. Bik argued that the ubiquitous word *kamf*, fight, was a 'holy metaphor': 'For Winchevsky the word *kamf* has a direct relationship to strivings to be the awakener from slavery and the caller to great deeds of heroism. It is, actually, for him a synonym for

The ‘children’ of the poem are the workers. This should not be seen as patronising as it was a term that Winchevsky used in response to his nickname and alter ego, the *zeyde* (grandfather).<sup>124</sup> The repeated refrain, that things are ‘moving’, creates both the excitement and the momentum of the song. The song’s melody is not fast, it is grounded and hundreds or thousands of Yiddish-speaking workers singing together at a walking pace could heighten the atmosphere where the sound would become part of the crowd.

The Chicago Haymarket demonstration did not end in socialist revolution, but in the death of five revolutionary worker leaders. The bloody Sunday demonstration in Trafalgar Square on November 1887 left one demonstrator dead, scores injured and hundreds arrested, including William Morris. This ‘sobered’ the revolutionary optimism.<sup>125</sup> Winchevsky was angry at the revolutionaries in Morris’ Socialist League for not ‘walking hand in hand’ with the SDF. He spoke out against it in an article in the *Arbayter fraynd* entitled ‘Di arbayter un zeyere firer’ (The workers and their leaders). In it he reproached the socialist leaders for their lack of unity at such an important moment. Marmor contends that ‘this was a big risk for a young socialist against such a beloved international figure as William Morris.’<sup>126</sup> The despair over the bloody Sunday demonstration led Morris to write a memorial poem to the demonstrator Alfred Linnell. In similar despair Winchevsky wrote almost no poetry in the next year.

By 1889, revolutionary excitement had returned. The dock strike had socialists and radicals ‘of every shade’ working together.<sup>127</sup> It inspired the Jewish socialists, trade union membership surged and the Jewish tailors’ strike was the first time that thousands of Jewish workers took to the streets in a general strike which ‘brought together trade unionists and revolutionaries, immigrants and English workers, strikers and shopkeepers.’<sup>128</sup> The poem ‘A bezem un a ker’ (A broom and sweeping), written for the tailors’ strike, imagined capitalism being swept away:

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heroism. ‘*Kampf*’ is that which transforms the slave into a hero and makes him dream in everyday truth’. Bik, *Troymer, kemfer*, 16–17.

<sup>124</sup> The term ‘children’ or ‘child’ was used in the column *Bilder un verter fun a meshugene filozof*.

<sup>125</sup> Livesey, *Culture of Aestheticism*, 45.

<sup>126</sup> Marmor, *Lebn*, 136–7.

<sup>127</sup> Harry Kelly, introduction to Eyges, *Horizon*, 16. See also Fishman, *Radicals*, 164–82.

<sup>128</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen*, 216–7.

... dan vet mer keyn mitlman,  
keyn parazit nit zayn!  
Keyn mitlman, keyn kitlman, keyn titlman  
nit zayn!

... then there will be no more middleman,  
No parasite!  
No middleman, no clergyman, no titled-man  
None!<sup>129</sup>

The use of the image of a broom, strongly connected to anarchism, reflected the socialists and anarchists working together in fighting for changes in labour laws, even as they were moving further apart politically and their differences were about to lead to an anarchist takeover of the *Arbayter fraynd*. In 1890 the shoe and boot makers struck with Jews and Gentiles working in close co-operation.<sup>130</sup> Winchevsky responded by producing the rallying cry ‘Der frayhayts-gayst’ (The Freedom Spirit), which was immediately put to music and sung.<sup>131</sup>

*In di gasn, – tsu di masn  
fun badrikte felker-rasn,  
ruft der frayhayts-gayst...*

Into the streets, – to the masses  
From oppressive human races,  
Calls the freedom-spirit...

*Ikh kum lern – arbet ern,  
ern, akhtn un bagern,  
arbet mit a tolk;  
glik un fridn, – ungheshidn  
tsvishn heydn, kristn, yidn,  
tsvishn folk un folk.*<sup>132</sup>

I come to teach – to honour work,  
Honour, care for and demand,  
Structured work;  
Joy and happiness, – no separation  
Between heathens, Christians, Jews,  
Between peoples.<sup>133</sup>

This song encapsulated the internationalist desire for a socialism that did not differentiate by religion, only by class. Winchevsky had, since his early socialist days with Liberman, been an internationalist, and throughout his time in London he remained one.<sup>134</sup> Years later, describing the strike fever in London, Winchevsky mused that: ‘We thought that slowly it would bring the socialist revolution. What a crazy thought!’<sup>135</sup> But at the time feeling was high and Winchevsky contributed to the body of socialist anthems by encouraging revolution, and giving material to be sung on marches. In 1892 Winchevsky participated in socialist activity in both Jewish and English circles, trying

<sup>129</sup> Winchevsky, ‘A bezem un a ker’, *AF*, 11 October 1889.

<sup>130</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen*, 224.

<sup>131</sup> For years this song was sung on May 1<sup>st</sup> demonstrations. Winchevsky even translated it into Hebrew. Marmor, *Lebn*, 153.

<sup>132</sup> The word *lern* is probably *lernen* to teach, possibly used in this form as a rhyme. It is not correct Yiddish here.

<sup>133</sup> Winchevsky, ‘Der frayhayts-gayst’, *AF*, 27 June 1890.

<sup>134</sup> After the Kishinev pogrom of 1903 Winchevsky accepted aspects of Jewish nationalism. See Litvak, ‘Vintshevski, der onheyber’, 7. Itshe Goldberg claimed Winchevsky felt stuck in the middle, attacked from both sides, socialist and nationalist. Goldberg, ‘A bezem un a ker’, *YK*, March 1967.

<sup>135</sup> Winchevsky, *Erinerungen*, 264.

to co-ordinate and unite union activity and encourage the worker to ‘take control of the mechanisms of power through strikes, boycotts, demonstrations and agitations.’<sup>136</sup>

In these poems Winchevsky wrote for a transnational audience, local references disappearing in addressing the whole Yiddish-speaking world. The London Socialist Workers’ Union brought out the weekly socialist-democratic journal *Der veker* (The Awakener). The first edition published the poem ‘kamf-gezung’ (Struggle-Song). It began: *Vikht fanander di fone di royte* (unfurl the red flag), and contained inclusive ideas:

<i>Yidelekh, ir zayt bay ale natsionen</i>	Jews, you are of all nations
<i>geyrim un toyshovim gevezn tsuglaykh</i>	Strangers and inhabitants will be equal,
<i>zayt itst bay zey in di frayhayts legionen...</i>	Be with them now in the freedom-legions... <sup>137</sup>

As well as rousing march songs, Winchevsky produced visions of a different and equal world. The poem ‘Tsvey veltn’ (Two Worlds) dreams of a time:

<i>Dort vu di froy iz a birgerin, tuendik</i>	Where the woman is a citizen doing
<i>zelbstendik ire natirlekhe flikht...</i>	Independent her natural duty...
<i>Vu mayn un dayn zaynen verter fargesene,</i>	Where ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ are forgotten words,
<i>her un knekht – nemen, vos keyner farshteyt.</i>	Ruler and slave names that no-one understands. <sup>138</sup>

And in one of his best known songs, brought back to life in the Yiddish revival today, ‘Di Tsukunft’ (the future) a time is envisaged when:

<i>Es vet nit zayn a mayster,</i>	There will be no masters,
<i>nit di kroyn un nit der tayster,</i>	Not the crown, not wealth,
<i>nit dem zelners shverd...</i>	Nor the soldier’s sword...
<i>Loz dos folk...</i>	Let the people...
<i>zikh nemen – nit farlangen –</i>	seize – not demand –
<i>rekht oyf der erd.</i>	Justice in the world. <sup>139</sup>

Winchevsky produced powerful images of revolution, of hope and possibility. He may have touched the excitement of fighting for equality and imagining a post-revolution future. With these poems, written as song lyrics, the audience would have participated

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<sup>136</sup> Marmor, *Lebn*, 172–3.

<sup>137</sup> *Veker*, 23 December 1892.

<sup>138</sup> Winchevsky, ‘Tsvey veltn’, *FV*, May 1891.

<sup>139</sup> Winchevsky, ‘Di Tsukunft’, *Freiheit*, 26-7 (dated 1892).

in creating the poem's fervour and atmosphere of a crowd moving together under a powerful political idea.

### Concluding Remarks

Winchevsky's poetry emerges as a form of activism in the fight for a socialist revolution. However, although Winchevsky contributed extensively to Jewish socialist debate, his small socialist group ultimately had little influence on the London Yiddish world. Despite some success in unionisation and strikes, gains were rarely maintained and Winchevsky's attempt to create an activist Jewish revolutionary movement in London was unsuccessful.

However, Winchevsky became a celebrity within the Yiddish socialist world, especially in America. Numerous articles described his poetry in glowing terms and meetings where he was to read his poetry advertised him as a famous personality. If the poetry did not achieve its ostensible aims, did the poetry achieve something else, some less tangible cultural products that went beyond the polemical message they contained? It is possible that the lasting success of the poetry was their cultural importance, becoming part of a popular socialist canon of songs that could be recited or sung by Yiddish-speaking Jews, whether political activists or not. Even today, several of his poems survive to be reproduced in recent Yiddish songbooks and recordings, and are regularly sung.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Recent publications of Winchevsky's songs include 'Dray shvester' in Aharon Vinkovetzky, Abba Kovner, and Sinai Leichter, *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1985), 213–4; 'Es rirt zikh' in Aharon Vinkovetzky, Abba Kovner, and Sinai Leichter, *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1987), 35–6; 'Di tsukunft' in Eleanor Gordon Mlotek and Joseph Mlotek, *Songs of Generations: New Pearls of Yiddish Song* (New York: Workmen's Circle, 2004), 86–7. Recordings include: *Dray Shvester*, performed by Metropolitan Klezmer Band, (New York: Rhythm Media Records, 2003), CD; *Di tsukunft*, performed by Adrienne Cooper, from *In Love and Struggle* (New York: YIVO, 1999), CD. *Di tsukunft* is taught in Yiddish songschools today. The most lasting cultural aspect may be the song 'Ale Brider', which is one of the best known Yiddish songs today, often performed and taught. 'Ale Brider' is inspired by Winchevsky's poem 'Akhdes', Eleanor Gordon Mlotek, *Mir Trogn a Gezang!: The New Book of Yiddish Songs* (New York: Workmen's Circle Education Department, 1989), 160–1. Also see chapter 6, fn 21.



## Chapter 5: Transforming Sex: in the East End Yiddish halls

*Ver geyt do in di hoyzn di laydiz ikh vet*      Who goes around in trousers here? The ladies I bet  
*der man shloft oyf der erd un der lodzher*      The husband sleeps on the floor and the lodger in  
*in bet*      the bed  
*di maydn zaynen kalt vi ays*      The women are as cold as ice  
*un dos iz a bavays*      And that is evidence  
*az london hot zikh ibergekert.*      That London has turned everything upside down.<sup>141</sup>

Between 1898 and 1908 dozens of songs were sung from the Yiddish music-hall stage in London, and many of them included sexually suggestive content. More than half of the eighty songs written about the London immigrant experience relate in some way to the experience of sex, making it the subject that comes up most frequently. The songs' sexual content partly relates to the universal experience of sex, but particularly refers to debates in the English public sphere and events, worries and the daily reality of being a Yiddish-speaking immigrant to England.

The songs considered in this chapter reflect changes in sexual mores. Although the nature of relationships and marriage were changing in Eastern Europe, these songs display how particular features of sexual contact are specifically connected to the immigrant process. They offer a wider view of sexual relations than the narrow religious definitions. They push for an engagement with modern life where there are more possibilities for sexual contact. England brings the freedom to consider different forms of living, or at least allowed immigrants to let off steam and laugh at the thought of more sexual choice. The Yiddish music-hall may not have constituted a site of anglicisation in a way that either Anglo-Jewry, immigrant socialists or the immigrant orthodox would have liked, yet the songs link changing attitudes to sex and abusive sex to Englishness. Although seen pejoratively as *shund* (trash) by its critics, the music-hall songs pertaining to sex offered opportunities for audiences to be a part of a modern world.

Scholarship about sex in the London immigrant community is missing from Anglo-Jewish historiography, except for three specific instances. Prostitution and the White Slave Trade was an ongoing concern in the community, and this has been given detailed

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<sup>141</sup> Sam Levenvirt, 'London hot zikh ibergekert', *LK*, 129. The song repeatedly refers to the changing role of women both as sexually active and as being more independent.

analysis by scholars.<sup>142</sup> The situation for un-married mothers was addressed by the community which supported Charcroft House as a home for unmarried pregnant women and unmarried mothers.<sup>143</sup> Finally, the particular anarchist position on free love appears as a narrative in the memoir of Rudolph Rocker, where he describes how being an advocate of free love and abjuring marriage meant that he and his partner Milly were refused entry into the United States.<sup>144</sup>

This chapter adds new detail to Anglo-Jewish historiography, through examining what the lyrics of twenty-seven London immigrant songs reveal about how sexual behaviour was affected by the London immigrant experience. It analyses the way the songs engage with ongoing debate in London around sex and prostitution. Although the songs locate themselves in London, the immigrant experience of sex and issues of modernity were not confined to England or, indeed, to immigrants. Therefore, despite the specificity of the allusion to London in the lyrics, the songs are transferable across a transnational Yiddish world.

The chapter splits the songs into three broad areas. The first area covers courtship and pre-marital sex and considers how lyrics engage with the reinvention of matchmaking, dowries and courtship outside of more traditional Eastern European religious structures. The second area concerns marriage and extra-marital sex. It analyses how song lyrics address marital tensions exacerbated by immigration, such as men abandoning their wives and domestic violence. In these songs London and England become the third party in domestic strife. Much of the humour takes the stock comic character of the lodger, and subverts it: the canny lodger seducing the landlady of English music hall is transformed into the naïve innocent orthodox immigrant lodger being seduced by the worldly and married landlady. These songs poke fun at how the sexual roles of men and women are altered by the experience of immigration. The final broad area covers sexual exploitation, abuse and prostitution, the ‘dirty linen’ of the community which is more oblique in the lyric, yet is a part of an ongoing discourse in the public sphere.

In order to interpret the particular role of singing about sex within the context of being an immigrant, two theoretical ideas are of particular importance: atmosphere and

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<sup>142</sup> Bristow, *Prostitution, Prejudice*; Marks, ‘Race, Class and Gender’; Knepper, ‘Racialisation of Crime’; Gartner, ‘International Traffic’.

<sup>143</sup> Tananbaum, *Immigrants in London*, 138–41.

<sup>144</sup> Rocker and Ward, *London Years*, 42.

‘knowingness’. These are helpful in elaborating Patrick Joyce’s argument that music-hall songs, with their imagined social order, were not simply a reflection of the outside world but were actively constructed by the audiences within the music halls as a way of experimenting with different possibilities of self-definition.<sup>145</sup>

Philosopher Gernot Böhme argues that the ‘atmosphere’ of a place is not simply ‘free floating’ in the air but ‘is created by things, persons or their constellations.’ He argues that atmospheres are actively ‘made’ rather than being a passive aesthetic property of an environment.<sup>146</sup> Philosopher Mikel Dufrenne suggests that atmospheres are unstable and constantly changing as different bodies relate to them.<sup>147</sup> These theories posit the idea of collaborations in the making of atmosphere. I suggest that this can shed light on how the Yiddish music hall encouraged courtship and sexual contact. It involved collaborations between the performer’s rendition of the Yiddish song, the audience response, the suggestive lyrics and even the nature of the music-hall space.

The importance of creating a sexy atmosphere through collaboration is also significant in Peter Bailey’s theory of ‘knowingness’. Bailey’s theory addresses the mechanism used to transform openly crude music hall songs into those where sex is less overt in the lyric, creating a sexual atmosphere more surreptitiously. ‘Knowingness’, or insider knowledge, is shared between the performer and the audience. Peter Bailey argues:

The prime device lay in the “things of suggestion”... it was the compressed code of the double entendre and the innuendo that signalled complicity with an audience, investing language, tone and gesture with oblique but knowing conspiracies of meaning.<sup>148</sup>

The performer substitutes explicit sexual references for innuendo, knowing that the audience will understand what is being referred to. Meaning is created through this collusion between performer and audience, maintained by the performer insinuating with hand signs, nods and winks, and the audience heckling, laughing and joining in. Bailey writes specifically about the English music hall, yet his theory seems to be of particular significance in the Yiddish music hall: the immigrant community as a Yiddish-speaking community within an English community. The insider knowledge of Yiddish culture and the experience of immigration put additional nuances onto the

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<sup>145</sup> Joyce, *Visions*, 224.

<sup>146</sup> Gernot Böhme, ‘Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics’, *Thesis Eleven* 36, no. 1 (1993): 121.

<sup>147</sup> Quoted in Ben Anderson, ‘Affective Atmospheres’, *Emotion, Space and Society* 2, no. 2 (2009): 79.

<sup>148</sup> Bailey, ‘Conspiracies’, 158.

sexual innuendo. The resulting atmosphere is personal, and although it is in a public place, gives the sense of a shared private space. To return to Joyce, the Yiddish music hall offered a place outside of immigrants' usual lives, which existed only while the creation of it was occurring. It allowed a space where people could behave in different ways.<sup>149</sup>

## **Sex and the Music Halls**

Impinging on the sexually charged atmosphere of the English music halls was Mrs Ormison Chant's campaigning against immorality. Chant was part of the Social Purity movement's '*National Vigilance Association*' (NVA), and her most notorious attack was against the presence of prostitutes in the audience of the music halls.<sup>150</sup> She considered immoral women to include female performers who had lost their modesty and sense of shame. She decried performers' clothing, incidents of nudity and indecent suggestiveness in the song lyrics.<sup>151</sup>

Music hall material was not censored in the same way as plays in the theatre. The London County Council (LCC) provided licenses to both theatres and music halls, but would only inspect music halls when complaints were received. A poor LCC inspection could close down a music hall, so the NVA encouraged the LCC's 'Theatre and Music Halls Committee' to repress anything they saw as immoral.<sup>152</sup> In order to avoid complaints many managers censored their own performers' material, fining or sacking performers for risky material such as an allusion to sodomy or extra-marital sex. However, audiences were often sympathetic to allusions of sexual impropriety. Although lyrics or nudity may be modified during an inspection, the entertainment 'remained in many ways similar in thrust to what it "traditionally" had been, but with a greater reliance on gesture or style of speech - insinuation rather than the words themselves.'<sup>153</sup> The performance became paramount.

Ormison Chant's campaign indicates one way in which the music halls were part of a broader debate around sex. Sex was discussed, 'contested and censored' in different

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<sup>149</sup> Joyce, *Visions*, 224.

<sup>150</sup> Chant directed her attack at the West End Empire's promenading area where the audience moved around freely and could be approached by prostitutes. Summerfield, 'Effingham Arms', 219.

<sup>151</sup> Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885-1914* (London: Penguin, 1995), 117.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>153</sup> Pennybacker, 'Not What She Said', 127-8.

forums in the English public sphere.<sup>154</sup> In 1885 a select group of radical, socialist and feminist middle-class society intellectuals met as the ‘Men and Women’s Club’ and discussed matters pertaining to sex and sexuality.<sup>155</sup> Their debates were both initiated and intensified by sensational reports appearing in the media about underage sex and prostitution.<sup>156</sup> Days before the club opened the *Pall Mall Gazette* published the ‘Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’. William Stead’s report created a public furore, not only for its exposé of prostitution rings in London but also for its melodramatic reporting style. The report used sub-titles such as: ‘How Girls are Bought and Ruined’; ‘Why the Cries of the Victims are not Heard’, and ‘You want a Maid. Do You?’.<sup>157</sup>

Melodrama was a popular genre generally associated with working class theatre, and the melodramatic reporting of the *Maiden Tribute* drew on this style of theatre, writing for a wide audience. The *Maiden Tribute* was touted by hawkers shouting at young women to make money in the same way.<sup>158</sup> A month after *The Tribute* was published the Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed, raising the age of consent for girls from 13 to 16. In order to ensure the enforcement of the act, social purity groups and vigilance committees were set up. Their remit was wider than the Act and included Chant’s campaign against immorality in the music halls.

Theatre historian Jacky Bratton argues that the need for the English writers to clean up vulgarities and use only innuendo made writers more creative and so produced more subtle and interesting texts.<sup>159</sup> The Yiddish music halls, though strongly influenced by their English counterparts, did not always produce the subtlety Bratton suggests. There were many critics of the Yiddish music halls’ crude and risky lyrics. The orthodox

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<sup>154</sup> Lesley Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain Since 1880* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2000), 30.

<sup>155</sup> Bland, *Banishing Beast*, 5–15. The Men and Women’s Club aimed to investigate dangerous aspects of male sexual behaviour and the existence of female desire. See Judith R. Walkowitz, ‘Science, Feminism and Romance: The Men and Women’s Club 1885-1889’, *History Workshop Journal* 21 (1986): 38.

<sup>156</sup> Although the Men and Women’s Club aimed to create a space apart from popular culture, it also gave serious consideration to the themes of the melodramatic headlines. Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 135–6.

<sup>157</sup> Stead, ‘Maiden Tribute’. Sensational writing about sex also appeared in the Yiddish press. The *Teglikher ekspres* (The Daily Express) front covers reproduced English drawings of sensational murders including a sexual element: ‘Cartwright was a beautiful factory girl. She died defending her chastity’ (12 August 1897). Articles included: ‘Married his sister and committed suicide’ (2 August 1897). In the *Idisher vokhentlikher zhurnal* a melodramatic story in 1906 described an East End gang member tyrannising street women who were too scared to testify in court (9 January 1907).

<sup>158</sup> For the use of melodrama in the *Maiden Tribute* see Walkowitz, *Dreadful Delight*, 81–94.

<sup>159</sup> Bratton, *Victorian Ballad*, 155–7.

immigrants saw the Yiddish theatre as a ‘nest of sin and blasphemy’ and complained of immoral content and performers’ sexual promiscuity.<sup>160</sup> The Anglo-Jews displayed anxiety about the moral welfare of the immigrants.<sup>161</sup> The socialists were ‘deeply ambivalent’ about the music halls, seeing it as a social problem and wanting workers to engage with higher culture.<sup>162</sup> It is possible that Yiddish lyrics were not censored by music-hall managers because they were less likely to cause offense outside of the immigrant community. Although there were a handful of incidents of immigrant gang violence at the halls that appeared in English newspapers, generally the Yiddish halls did not cause a high level of crime or incidents involving prostitutes.<sup>163</sup> The Anglo-Yiddish songs that do refer to sex offer an intriguing insight into the changes that immigration brought to sexual relations within the immigrant community.

### **Courtship and pre-marital sex**

For orthodox Jews in Eastern Europe betrothal and marriage had been a tightly structured system organised by family and community but not including the prospective marriage partners. The parents helped by a *shadkhn* (matchmaker) were involved in a decision based on uniting families and creating economic stability. The suitability of a prospective partner was judged by family lineage, Talmud scholarship and money. Although character suitability may have been taken into account, sentimental reasons were not generally considered as important as creating a strong religious and economically viable unit for the purpose of bringing up a family. There were formal rituals of courtship where the two young people would have had few (if any) opportunities to spend time alone together. The matchmaker suggested partners, the young people met with supervision, and the whole procedure was a family contract.<sup>164</sup> Even after a couple were engaged, they could still only meet under strict parental guidance, if, indeed, they met at all, before the betrothal ceremony.

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<sup>160</sup> Harendorf, ‘Yidish teatr’, 232–3.

<sup>161</sup> For example Lewis. ‘East End Judaism – Need and Possibilities of Reform’, *JC*, 20 February 1903.

<sup>162</sup> Warnke, ‘Popular Culture’, 321. Warnke’s article examines socialists attitude to the Lower East side Yiddish halls.

<sup>163</sup> The East End was terrorised by the rival Bessarabian and Odessan gangs, who frequented the music halls, including a murder outside the York Minster music hall. *ELO*, 29 November 1902. Lawrence describes how gangs ‘defeated’ Sali and Filip Vayznfraynd’s ability to run the hall. Lawrence, *Paul Muni*, 27. Also see Morton, *East End Gangland & Gangland International Omnibus*, 47–9. In another incident, an ‘alleged riot’ in the Manor theatre in Hackney, two Jewish tailors arguing over the quality of different theatres, ended with chairs ripped up and thrown around. *ELO*, 10 May 1902.

<sup>164</sup> Sydney Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers: The Lives of Jewish Immigrant Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 23–4.

To support this there were two major economic systems set in place: the dowry and *kest*. The bride's dowry would provide money to begin their new life, a trousseau and domestic implements needed for a new home. *Kest* was a system of support whereby the bride's father provided food and lodging for a set number of years for his son-in-law to continue studying in a *yeshive* (Jewish seminary).<sup>165</sup> These systems had worked well in Eastern European *shtetlekh* (small towns) where everyone knew each other, lived life in community and had little private life. In the larger towns, Lemberg, Lvov, Lodz, Warsaw or Odessa, life was more easy-going with a greater influx of modern ideas. By the end of the nineteenth century the challenges of modernity and the consequences of migration affecting the wider society were beginning to influence the system of arranged marriages. Still under parental control the arrangement started to become a more "compassionate marriage" based on mutual respect, emotional and intellectual compatibility, and affection.<sup>166</sup>

Although arranged marriages continued in London in orthodox circles, it became less ubiquitous. Many single men, having come alone, may not have had family to support them, and as secularisation grew, people began to make their own matches. Single people had to find ways to re-define what courtship meant without the old formal structures. They needed places to meet and ways to finance courtship and marriage without the formality of a dowry. The search for a marriage partner was exacerbated by the mismatch in numbers of single Jewish immigrant men and women in London.<sup>167</sup> The high number of single men coming alone from Eastern Europe had left a dearth of marriageable-aged men in Eastern Europe, and a surfeit in the Yiddish Diaspora. There was therefore greater competition for a bride amongst the immigrant population. In addition, in the absence of religion, new ideas around women's role in sexual relationships and changing attitudes to physical contact between men and women put the redefinition of sexual mores clearly on the agenda.

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<sup>165</sup> *Kest* was not only to allow the newly married man to study, but also to let the couple save enough to establish an independent home. ChaeRan Freeze, *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia* (New England: University Press of New England [for] Brandeis University Press, 2002), 30–1.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12. This change was partly due to resistance by children to arranged partners. Despite parents opposition, children would run away from home or convert to Christianity to marry the partner of their choice. *Ibid.*, 16–17. For the changes in community control in villages and towns see Sharot, *Judaism*, 103–4. For middle-class women, remaining single became an option. Naomi Shepherd, *A Price Below Rubies: Jewish Women As Rebels and Radicals* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1993), 212–4.

<sup>167</sup> Lipman, *Britain since 1858*, 49.

### *Dansing skul: Locations for courting*

Whereas in the past, matchmaking took place in the home, when the system broke down the places for courtship also disappeared. Immigrants, who had left the parental home and religious backgrounds behind them in Eastern Europe, needed to find new places in London to meet a prospective marriage partner. Public locations were established where men and women could mingle and make their own choices. Often for the first time, men and women worked alongside each other in the workplace. Workers clubs, friendly societies and political organisations put on concerts and socials, and the socialist and anarchist clubs tried to entice young people to socialism with frequent balls and benefits.<sup>168</sup> The bustling Yiddish thoroughfares, such as Whitechapel Road, were popular courting grounds, and the Yiddish theatres and music halls served the same function.<sup>169</sup>

The *London Standard* in 1902 reported how in the Yiddish music hall there were ‘scores of engaged couples dotted about’, and ‘young Yiddish bucks too, in their smartest Sabbath attire and imitation “joolery”; good-looking young Jewesses in the newest modes of Oxford Street, “latest style, nineteen and eleven pence”.’<sup>170</sup> Martha Vicinus describes how the English music-hall was a place where young, unmarried and newly married could meet the opposite sex, relax and feel sexy:

For many young men, cooped up in an all-male office or warehouse all day the close proximity of women, drink and smoke made a giddy and inviting atmosphere that broke down their natural shyness and difficulty in speaking to women of their own class.<sup>171</sup>

The atmosphere of a social club where people go to chat, rather than watch a show, was remarked on by four different visitors to the London Yiddish stage:

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<sup>168</sup> The Bund activities in Eastern Europe offered a place for single men and women to meet and develop romantic ties through political bonds. However political activism did not equate with libertinism. ‘Although the “sexual revolution” and family question were central to the radical movements, some parties felt obliged to regulate relationships. The unprecedented intermingling of the sexes impelled the Bund... not only to reject the idea of sexual license espoused by some radicals but also to uphold a strict code of morality that essentially mirrored the norms of traditional Jewish society.’ Freeze, *Jewish Marriage*, 23–4.

<sup>169</sup> ‘The Whitechapel Road in those days [1909] was an extraordinary corso. The East End youngsters paraded up and down, the girls, according to fashion, in blue velvet, the boys all in brown, from hat to shoes, their white panama canes alone providing a colour contrast.’ Charles Landstone, ‘Edwardian Vignettes: A Visit to the Pavilion Theatre’, *JC*, 27 November 1970.

<sup>170</sup> ‘Music-Hall in East End’

<sup>171</sup> Vicinus, *Industrial Muse*, 249–50.



- Everyone talks, makes remarks to their friend about every word or arm lifted by the actors as if he felt he was in the Lane on a Sunday rather than at the theatre.
- The audience [is] noisy and demonstrative, as Yiddish audiences invariably are everywhere. Everyone is talking, laughing and chattering.
- The noise never stopped. It was not silenced, but only subdued, by the rise of the curtain.
- The Jews... don't know how to sit in the Yiddish theatre, everyone shouts, brawls and interrupts.<sup>172</sup>

These comments certainly describe sociability, yet do not mention the sexual nature of that contact.<sup>173</sup> A more caustic satirical comment was published on the front cover of the *Blofer* of 1912, with a cartoon captioned 'How Jews sit in a Yiddish theatre.' Instead of chairs, the stalls were made up of beds with canoodling couples on each one.<sup>174</sup>

One of the crucial elements about a space of courtship is its atmosphere. Atmosphere can emerge through singing popular songs, creating popular memory and association. Two singalong songs by Arn Nager fictionalise familiar local places, one a generic dancing school and the other, the oft frequented Victoria Park. These locations, transformed into music-hall narratives, blur the boundary between the real and the unreal, allowing atmosphere of the songs to transfer into the music hall. In this way, the song lyrics contributed to the atmosphere by imagining places for courtship. Both 'Der dansing skul' and 'Viktorye park' use the locations as a container offering possibilities for sexual contact.<sup>175</sup> The songs tell us less about the real-life places than about the ribaldry of the Yiddish music hall, suggesting that, indeed, the function of these songs was in creating a sexy atmosphere where physical contact became a possibility.

The physicality of the subject matter in the title 'Der dansing skul' itself may have heightened the expectation of the audience. Dances were a major source of entertainment in clubs, socialist benefits and Yom Kippur balls. The unspecified dancing school is used by Nager as a container for making a rhymed innuendo:

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<sup>172</sup> Eyner, 'Idisher teatr', 1901; 'A Music-Hall in the East End'; Landstone, 'Edwardian Vignettes'; Eyner, 'Idisher teatr', 1902. The reference to the 'Lane', is Petticoat Lane in Whitechapel.

<sup>173</sup> There were often two music-hall shows a night: an earlier performance for families and children, which omitted the saucier material. A *JC* review of an early showing at the Princess's music hall, commented on its purity and lack of suggestive material. The early showing only had an audience of a hundred, but the later performances had five hundred. 'A visit to the Yiddish Music Hall'.

<sup>174</sup> *Blofer*, November 1912, cover. Image is reproduced in Appendix 4.

<sup>175</sup> The song 'Gevald, gevald Police' (Help, Help, Police!) suggests the home as a place of courtship, where young men can get so 'fresh' that the police need to be called. *Gevald, gevald Police*, Rubinstein.

*Ven di muzik shpilt azoy zis  
heybn di meyn – di hent  
ikh zog aykh es iz a prakht  
tsu farbrenge a nakht  
nur in dansing skul.*

...

*Reytshel hot lib tsu shpringen hoykh  
in dem dansing skul  
biz zi hot bakumen a geshvolenem – fus  
in dem dansing skul.*

When the music plays so sweetly  
The girls lift up – their hands  
I tell you it is magnificent  
To have fun at night  
In the dancing school.

...

Rachel loves to jump high  
In the dancing school  
Until she got a swollen – foot  
In the dancing school.<sup>176</sup>

These verses use typical schoolboy-style wordplay, where pauses in the lyric suggest a rhyming sexual gag, but another word is used to create a humorous substitute which still contains the innuendo. The word *zis* (sweet) in the first line of the Yiddish text would rhyme with *fis* (legs) but instead the word *hent* (hands) is used. Similarly the word *hoykh* (high) would rhyme with *boykh* (stomach), but the word *fus* (foot) is used. There is nothing subtle here, and just in case the *double entendre* is missed, the following lines clarify that ‘She asked a doctor and he told her / That she was to become a mother soon.’ The lyric conjures images of female bodies and sex without having to be explicit. The humour works because of the way it is performed, with pauses by the singer and a glint in their eye, holding the gag as the audience contributes with laughter. The combination of the evocation of a dance class in the lyric, the cheeky performance and the audience response may not have created an atmosphere for serious courtship, rather it may have created space for behaviour considered unacceptable elsewhere. The lack of sophistication in the song gives hints as to the make-up the audience: intoxicated lads in the second show of the evening.

The suggestion of sexual activity does not have any particular cultural specificity to being a Jewish immigrant in England, yet Nager takes pains to transform the generic into an Anglo-immigrant dance class. There is a threepence entry fee, and a string of anglicisms including *mesh* (mash, slang for flirt) to rhyme with *keshe* (cash) establishing the English location of the dance school. In the second verse the audience is addressed as ‘Oh Jews’, emphasising to the local Yiddish-speaking audience know that this is directed at them as part of the Jewish immigrant community. The universal experience of flirting and sexual contact becomes specific to the people standing in the music hall in London. I suggest that this local association does important work. It gives a cosy

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<sup>176</sup> Nager, ‘Der dansing skul’, *LK*, 107.

feeling, of sharing, being together, living in the present. The song and its ideas become personal to the East End immigrant audience.

A second song that creates a fictional landscape of a familiar location is 'Viktorye park'. The real Victoria Park is on the northern edge of the East End, and was constantly frequented by East End Jews.<sup>177</sup> Zangwill's evocation of the park in *Children of the Ghetto* offers a scene of serenity:

Victoria Park was *the* park to the Ghetto. A couple of miles off. Far enough to make a visit to it an excursion, it was a perpetual blessing to the Ghetto.... Esther loved the park in all weathers, but best of all in the summer, when the great lake was bright and busy with boats, and the birds twittered in the leafy trees and the lobelias and calceolarias were woven into wonderful patterns by the gardeners.<sup>178</sup>

This floral and pictorial description stands in stark contrast to Nager's comic depiction of a sexually-charged Victoria Park. Nager creates an eclectic mix of characters frequenting the park. They are coarsely depicted in the Yiddish style of giving uncomplimentary adjectival descriptions before the name, such as 'fat Annie', 'spotty Fanny' or 'red Benny'. Other characters include a porter with a red neck, Maymi Loksh with false teeth and Adi Bor, the biggest kike (an offensive word for Jew). Some of the language is vulgar, though with a word like 'kike' it may be subverted in this context to be comic and could simply refer to his size. The sexual content of the song transforms Victoria Park into an uncouth and boorish place. There are young people flirting, Yudke and Reytschel Tsvok, are clad 'she with a shoe, he a sock', a married couple walk together past a Jewish prostitute, and a canoodling couple rolling about in the grass 'get married' in Victoria Park. The environment of the park is built up to be sleazy rather than a place for respectable courtship. The characters are humorous and there are lots of them, some named and some referred to as groups 'running breathless' or 'lying about snoring' or *landslayt* (people from the same town in Eastern Europe) looking for jobs. The last verse pushes the song into a different realm, making explicit, crude jibes around sexual anatomy:

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<sup>177</sup> Victoria Park was so popular it was called 'the Polish Brighton', and the tram or bus heading there 'the Polish Express'. Black, *Social Politics*, 231.

<sup>178</sup> Zangwill and Rochelson, *Children of the Ghetto*, 165. Zangwill can be seen as a PR man for the immigrants, producing an idealized and romanticized version of the 1870s.

*Dort geyt reb Itzik vos raybt dem smitshik  
zayn noz iz shpitshik vayl er heys itsik  
dort pedlt meyer mit foyle eyer  
dray far a tsveyer in viktorye park*

There goes Mr Itzik, who rubs his willy  
His nose is pointed, so he's called Itzik.  
There is Meyer peddling rotten eggs  
Three for tuppence in Victoria Park.<sup>179</sup>

The use of *smitshik* as a rhyme with Itzik is not original, and, as mentioned earlier, due to the paucity of words rhyming with Itzik may have been an obvious choice in this context.<sup>180</sup> It intensifies the sleazy atmosphere, so that the humour builds to a crescendo where Meyer is peddling rotten *eyer*, Yiddish for eggs, but slang for 'balls'. The sexual banter in 'Viktorye park' sets up a patchwork of references to local and global, combining in an Anglo-Yiddish feel. This is underlined by the lively and boisterous melody of 'Viktorye park', mentioned in chapter three, which strongly evokes the tune *London Bridge is Falling Down*. This enables the song to connect sexual behaviour both to the English music-hall and the immigrant experience.

'Viktorye park' and 'Dansing skul' do not evoke everyday pictures of real locations, rather they are crafted backdrops to the narrative of the lyrics. The images conjured by the songs set a ribald tone for couples meeting in the London Yiddish music hall. The sense of 'knowingness' created by performer innuendo and audience singing and heckling, pushing and giggling, both generates and extends the meaning. The interplay between performer, audience, lyric and location seem to contribute to the creation of an environment where courting and touching become possible.

### ***Azoy geyt dos gelt avek: Matchmaking and dowry***

As the structures of arranged marriage disappeared, the system of matchmakers and dowries changed. Although young people may have been introduced to prospective partners by family, friends or co-workers, many songs tell comic narratives of young people becoming their own matchmakers desperately trying to get the best match for themselves. No longer being given a dowry, and parents' financial support re-defined on a more *ad hoc* basis, young people had to pay for courting out of their own pockets

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<sup>179</sup> Nager, 'Viktorye park, *LLM*, 15. The published version has three verses. Reid recorded two verses from Bertha Jackson. He was sent a third verse (different to the published version) by an un-named man who had heard the Jackson recording on the radio. Reid, 'Six Yiddish Street Songs', 111.

<sup>180</sup> 'Itzik smitshik' is one of a vocabulary of vulgar names. Michael Wex, *Born to Kvetch: Yiddish Language and Culture In All of Its Moods* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2005), 204. The word *raybn* is slang for 'screw', and in the reflexive *raybn zikh* means masturbate. Beinfeld and Bochner, *Yiddish Dictionary*, 646.

or find ways of making money to do so. The hope of economic improvement through immigration was hard to realise, and anxiety over money was acute. Nevertheless, after paying for board and lodgings or contributing to the family income, some young unmarried men and women who were independently earning money did end up with a little disposable income.<sup>181</sup> This may have paid for a ticket to the Yiddish music hall where matchmaking, money and courtship were the butt of many jokes. Far from allaying any anxiety about money, songs often set up comic scenarios to laugh at the predicaments young people got into.

The song ‘Azoy geyt dos gelt avek’ (And So the Money Disappears) tells of young men going to great lengths to impress their girlfriends, borrowing money from family members or pawning their belongings to buy jewellery and perfume and outings to visit Crystal Palace.<sup>182</sup> Crystal Palace was one of the great Victorian attractions with a huge glass and iron building from the Great Exhibition of 1851, and park with statues, gardens and exhibits. A trip there was clearly a way to make a good impression with a status symbol of Empire combined with ‘alcohol, fashion and spectacle.’<sup>183</sup> It was glamorous, impressive, very English and away from the East End. It can be seen as a symbol of anglicisation, of a changing status, moving towards becoming English. Yet ‘becoming’ can be a precarious state and in the chorus the young man’s ‘head is spinning’ as his wages disappear on courtship. The picture of a young immigrant whose head is spinning could well be an iconic image for the effects of immigration. For many young people, the absence of parents and sexes mingling in the workplace may have brought a sense of emancipation and new sexual freedom, but it also brought insecurity and bewilderment. In Bohlman’s framework of ‘disjuncture’, the tension between displacement and acculturation is a creative force.<sup>184</sup> The point of disjuncture can be seen in this song where nothing was the same, there was no familiar foothold, and the free world made one’s head spin in confusion and the need for readjustment.

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<sup>181</sup> By 1911 women in England were delaying marriage until 25 or 26, so that they could work longer. This gave them more time to save for their dowries, and after contributing to the family income they had some degree of independence. Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries*, 70.

<sup>182</sup> ‘Azoy geyt dos gelt avek’, *LK*, 52; SG.

<sup>183</sup> Peter Gurney, “‘A Palace for the People?’” The Crystal Palace and Consumer Culture in Victorian England’, in *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace*, ed. James Buzard, Joseph Childers, and Eileen Gillooly (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 139.

<sup>184</sup> Bohlman, ‘Migration Ends’, 57.

One option the songs posited for men who did not have enough money to get married, was to find a girl who did: 'I am looking for a girl with a dowry / I will marry her even if she's not in a hurry' sang Arn Nager in *Genendel*. Without his own money the suitor had to offer something else in his search for a wife. Nager's suitor promised to work for his beloved Genendel, wash, cook and bake for her and fuss over her, make her laugh and treat her better than Rothschild if only she married him and put some money into his new business.<sup>185</sup> Part of the humour of this song was the role reversal in which the man chose to take on a traditionally female role of cooking and cleaning in return for financial help. Role reversal was not infrequent in the music-hall songs flagging up the tensions of being a, usually male, immigrant. For unmarried Jewish immigrant men searching for a bride, competition was fierce. Though young women in the audience may have laughed at the fantastical idea that they, as women, had greater choice, or, indeed, could have become as English as Rothschild.

For a working girl, creating her own dowry became particularly important, because having independent means could change her marriage prospects. The disruption of moving to England and settling into the new culture lost many women those vital years when they were deemed of marriageable age. In 'Ver zukht a kale' (Who's looking for a bride?) the singer beyond her early adulthood sees herself as too old to be courted, so she has to have money or she would not be able to find a husband. She writes an advertisement clearly stating: 'I'm looking for a husband and I have cash.' Portraying a woman as her own matchmaker was double edged. On one hand the song sits against the background of the English suffrage movement, which brought images of independent women campaigning into the public sphere. Yet on the other hand, a woman's money still went to her husband on marriage. So for an immigrant man the fictional advert suggested in this song would have been an enticing prospect.<sup>186</sup>

Women's growing independence was regularly staged by female singers. Much of the humour that women performed subverted what was expected by displaying women in positions which were less usual in the lived life of the Jewish East End. One aspect of arranged marriages, that caused much unhappiness on the part of young women, was when they were promised by their parents to older men in order to marry into the right family. In two Anglo-Yiddish music-hall songs, this distressing situation is subverted.

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<sup>185</sup> Nager, 'Genendel', *LK*, 122.

<sup>186</sup> 'Ver zukht a kale'. *LK*, 111.

In ‘Gevalt es iz a shlekhte tsayt’ (Help it is a Terrible Time) and ‘Opgeklapte hoyshayne’ (Beaten Willows), young women go willingly into unions with elderly rich gentlemen as a way of getting enough money to spend on their younger lovers. In ‘Opgeklapte hoyshayne’ the inversion does not spare the husband a good share of sexual humour, with the title being a comment on the elderly rich gentleman’s lack of sexual prowess.<sup>187</sup> Subverting the narrative can be seen as offering young women in the audience wish fulfilment of being in control despite the match contracted by parents. The song combats the anxiety that she could be married off to someone a generation older than herself. Making fun of arranged marriages gave a space for women in the audience to be entertained with the prospect that they could subvert reality, before going back to the tensions of their daily lives.

Yet women’s growing independence was not glorified. Popular on both sides of the Atlantic was the song ‘A boytshik ap to deyt’ (An Up-to-Date Guy).<sup>188</sup> It tells the story of a young American immigrant Lize Klaf who saves her wages for a dowry to get herself:

*A mesher, a tof*  
*a goo-goo, a blof*  
*a boytshikl vi in posuk shteyt*  
*a tentser, a brand*  
*an englishman*  
*a boytshik ap to deyt.*

A dandy, a swell  
 With dreamy eyes and assurance  
 A cool bloke  
 Cocky, lively  
 An Englishman  
 An utterly modern guy.<sup>189</sup>

This song seems to be brazenly over-stepping the Jewish cultural boundaries, because an ‘Englishman’ means neither a Jewish immigrant nor an anglicised Jew. An Englishman means a Christian. In addition, the Englishman is clearly middle class. Lize’s dowry has to be enough to claim a middle-class swell, enough to provide an enticement for a Gentile to marry a Jew. This narrative is, however, a cautionary tale because all does not end well. Marrying out of the community was not going to be sanctioned in this music-hall song. Here was a status quo that was less likely to be tampered with. Gentiles appear in songs, but not as suitable husbands for Jewish girls.

<sup>187</sup> Finklshteyn, ‘Opgeklapte hoyshayne’, *SM*. The title refers to the ritual of beating willow leaves on the festival of *hoyshane rabe*. The slang term ‘Opgeshlogene hoyshayne’ means a person or thing that has had their day. Beinfeld and Bochner, *Yiddish Dictionary*, 258.

<sup>188</sup> The popularity of this song is evidenced by its being published in London and New York. In addition, there is a songsheet sketch published of a conversation between the characters of the song. *Lize klaf*, SY. The song was popular enough to have been remembered by Bertha Jackson, *Lizzie Clough* performed by Bertha Jackson (London: Unpublished recording by Derek Reid, 1978), Cassette tape.

<sup>189</sup> Yozefson, ‘A boytshik ap to deyt’, *SM*.

The songs that describe attempts to re-define courtship in an English context did not need to bear any close resemblance to reality, instead they would have allowed the audience to laugh at the real anxiety of having to find a partner with less support in the new country.

***Haf past nayn: Pre-marital sex***

Although it was deemed unacceptable for un-married men and women to have sexual relations before marriage, there is no specific Jewish law against it unless it is incestuous or adulterous.<sup>190</sup> Orthodox communities put safeguards in place to limit young peoples' contact with the opposite sex outside of their own family. With the disruption of immigration and an abandonment of religion, however, sex before marriage no longer had the same gravitas attached to it. Indeed, the music hall could be seen to encourage sexual contact.

Few music-hall songs alluding to pre-marital sex make any moral judgment: rather, they tell comic tales, and may have offered the possibility that sex could be available outside marriage and that partners could be found in the Yiddish music hall. Nager offers a cheeky narrative in the song 'Plezhur' (Pleasure). The song offers advice to girls on how to get a husband.

*Meydlekh far aykh – hob ikh a zakh  
a plezhur!*

*Folg mayn plan – un nemt a man  
es iz a plezhur!*

*Es iz laykht un gring – zo lang ir zayt ying  
dem plezhur!*

*Un punkt tsum yor – krigt ir oyf shur  
a plezhur.*

Girls, I've got something for you

A pleasure!

Follow my plan and get a husband

It is a pleasure!

It is light and simple – as long as you're young

The pleasure!

And within the year – you get for sure

A pleasure.<sup>191</sup>

Implied in Nager's song, is the idea that if a girl does get pregnant, the boy will marry her. Nager's assumption may not have been a foolproof plan, as the Sarah Pyke House which housed girls having babies outside of marriage attested.<sup>192</sup> The song 'Plezhur' uses an anglicism as its title word that could either imply becoming English and joining

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<sup>190</sup> Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law: The Essential Texts, Their History, and Their Relevance for Today* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 190.

<sup>191</sup> Nager, 'Plezhur', *LLM*, 9–10.

<sup>192</sup> Knepper, 'Racialisation of Crime', 67–9.



English society, with the pleasure that brings, or it could again be a warning about where anglicisation can lead.

The link between sex and English society is also alluded to in the song ‘Haf past nayn’. The narrative describes a girl who is ‘led astray by a charlatan.’ She desires marriage, but he will not agree until ‘half past nine’.<sup>193</sup> The anglicised term ‘half past nine’ as a euphemism for sex was used in English music-hall songs.<sup>194</sup> The use of the same title serves to accentuate (even if tongue in cheek), that ‘half past nine’ is something foreign to the Yiddish immigrant. It distances Jews from somewhat illegitimate sex in the wider culture. Even if Jews were (allegedly) ‘doing it’, it is seen as an English thing to do. Similar to the song ‘A boytshik ap to deyt’ there is a sense of a cautionary tale here. A charlatan is not a Jew, and a charlatan is not someone to fall in love with.

Markovitsh’s song ‘Mazl’ (Luck) makes the same case yet more clearly. The second verse describes a couple who have prayed to God for children to no avail. The verse concludes:

<i>Un irs a shvesterl mit a kurts kleydl</i>	And her sister with a short dress,
<i>on khasene, on khupe glat azoy</i>	Without wedding, without khupe, just like that
<i>hot shoyn gehat a yingl mit a meyd</i>	Has already got a boy and a girl
<i>nu hot zi nit dos mazl fun a goy?</i>	So hasn’t she got a Gentile’s luck? <sup>195</sup>

This verse implies that pregnancy outside of marriage is not a very *Jewish* thing, or at least if you behave that way, you’re not behaving in a Jewish way. The statement, however tongue in cheek, suggests that there is luck to be had by throwing off religious mores and modernising morality. However, this sort of luck is only there for the English Gentiles. The song seems to reiterate to the laughing music-hall audience, as if they need reminding, that they are Jews and immigrants and in a small enclosed Yiddish-speaking community, and those are the *Jewish* customs.

There is a Janus-type quality to these songs.<sup>196</sup> The songwriters know enough about the old ways to know that the orthodox immigrants in the audience would be appalled at

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<sup>193</sup> ‘Haf past nayn,’ *SG*, MPC.

<sup>194</sup> Charles Collins, ‘Half Past Nine on my Wedding Day’, sung by the English comic Nellie Wallace. Here the bride is looking forward to her wedding night as ‘we’re going to blow out the candles at half past nine’. Peter Davison, *Songs of the British Music Hall* (London: Oak Publications; distributed by Music Sales Corp., 1971), 220–3. See also Wal Pink and George Le Brunn ‘Half-Past Nine’ (1893),

<sup>195</sup> Markovitsh, ‘Mazl’, *LLM*.

their representation of sex in the lyrics. Yet they also know that those same immigrants know enough about the new ways not to be appalled, and to see that it is not a malevolent attack on the orthodox. For the non-religious immigrants there seems to be a conceit that we are English enough to laugh at the old ways and Jewish enough to see what has changed. The audience enjoying the joke is a very powerful statement of one's level of integration into English culture, and this humour operates because of the Janus-effect of multi-stranded identity. The assertion of ethnic particularity is in Yiddish, but located in England. It gives the audience a foot in both worlds old and new. The combination of old and new creates a new cultural artefact, a hybrid mixture sometimes called 'ethnicisation'.<sup>197</sup> So these songs are not lamenting migration, but they are aware of the transition. Indeed, the audiences may partly go to the Yiddish music hall to remind themselves of that in a safe environment.

New ways of courtship provided fertile ground for humour, though the songs' narrative rarely ended with a happy marriage. The music-hall songwriters may not have seen happy endings to be entertaining or saucy enough material for the music-hall audiences. The only description of the transition to marriage in these songs was Nager's 'Malke, malke': 'I finally married her, I am now her husband / But when I go out of the house, the lodger comes in.'<sup>198</sup> To the music-hall audiences, marriage was portrayed as the end of lighthearted courtship and the beginning of difficulties. And it was marriage tensions that provided further opportunities for making comedy.

### **Marriage and extra-marital sex**

Historian Ellen Ross argues that English wives had to be tough and stand their ground, which frequently led to violence: 'pubs were regularly invaded by angry wives, where husbands cheated wives, wives stole from husbands, and music halls nightly unfolded new chapters in the domestic struggle for power.'<sup>199</sup> The Yiddish music halls also told of marital problems, making spoofs out of heartbreaking situations, yet the circumstances of these marriages had some significant differences to their English counterparts.

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<sup>196</sup> Janus was a Greek God depicted with two faces looking both to the past and the future.

<sup>197</sup> For ethnicisation, see Morawska, 'Immigrants, Transnationalism', 178–9. For hybridity, see Dujunco, 'Hybridity and Disjuncture', 28.

<sup>198</sup> Nager, 'Malke, malke', *LK*, 115.

<sup>199</sup> Ross, 'Fierce Questions', 221.

### *Brivelekh fun rusland: marriage tensions*

Some of the Yiddish-speaking audience would have had arranged marriages in Eastern Europe, and some may have married in an East End *khevre*. There would have been newly married couples coming together and married men alone in London seeking entertainment as they saved money to bring over their families from Eastern Europe. The problems that immigration posed for marriage was well documented in the media. The column *A bintel brif* (A Bundle of Letters), in the New York Yiddish daily *Forverts*, attests to the range of personal problems immigrants had with relationships as a direct consequence of moving country: differences between husband and wife in religious observance; falling out of love; finding other partners; sexual problems, and being unable to deal with marriage as it changed in a new country.<sup>200</sup>

Many married men came to England months or years in advance of their wives and families, waiting until they had enough money to send for them. Some husbands used immigration as an excuse to escape family tensions and responsibilities, disappearing without a trace into a crowded London and abandoning their families back in Eastern Europe. Some took a second wife and started new families. The deserted wife in Eastern Europe was left without a bread-winner and without any knowledge of where her husband was. This had serious implications for an orthodox woman, because in Jewish law a wife cannot divorce her husband on her own accord, she has to be given a *get* (divorce papers) by her husband. If he cannot be traced or proved dead she is left an *agune*, a trapped woman. She may be poverty-stricken but cannot get married again.<sup>201</sup> Markovitsh's song 'Brivelekh fun rusland' (Letters from Russia) captures the desperation of this situation. The song is in the form of letters from Khaye-sore, who has been deserted in Russia, to her husband who has come to London and disappeared. She hears nothing in return:

*Nur ikh zits farshpart  
ikh vart un vart un vart  
fun der dire hot men mikh aroysgetriben  
undzer moyshela iz shlaf  
ikh shray tsum himl aroyf  
un du vilst keyn entfere nit gebn*

But I sit imprisoned  
I wait and wait and wait.  
I have been thrown out of my flat  
Our Moyshele is sick  
I cry to heaven  
And you don't want to give an answer.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Isaac Metzker, *A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 65–7, 68–70.

<sup>201</sup> For examples of this situation, see Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 168–70.

<sup>202</sup> Markovitsh, 'Brivelekh fun rusland', *LK*, 31. This song should not be confused with Solomon Smulewitz, 'A brivele fun rusland', 1912.

These lyrics were close enough to this ‘common’ experience in the immigrant community.<sup>203</sup> Both the Anglo-Yiddish and Anglo-Jewish press publicised the situation.<sup>204</sup> Women were not only abandoned in Russia, some families were abandoned in England while their husbands went on to America. The Board of Guardians checked that there was no collusion between husband and wife, because Anglo-Jewish charities were left to maintain the impoverished family. As a deterrent they would attempt to trace the husband, but not support the wife.<sup>205</sup> Charities went to considerable lengths to track down the husband rather than pay out. This background information would have needed no spelling out to the music-hall audience, because it was part of the collective experience of immigration.<sup>206</sup>

‘Brivelekh fun rusland’ narrates letters *from* Russia *to* London, making not only the husband but London the villain of the piece. London is the immoral place where the husband disappeared. In the second verse Khaye-sore tells us ‘I have pawned everything / including your *tales* [prayer shawl].’ This has symbolic significance where the husband saw these religious artefacts as unnecessary in London. Peña argues that re-interpretation of cultural symbols in the new country only happens with resistance.<sup>207</sup> Here the *tales* signifies not only religion, but the abandonment of religion, and London was where you could abandon your religious practice as well as your wife. Khaye-sore envies her husband’s ‘London joy’. So London becomes the third party in the relationship causing the split. The Diaspora of London becomes a dangerous and evil place where lives are destroyed and new lives are re-made. In desperation the final letter curses the husband: *Geyt a mise meshine / in di goldene medine* (Literal meaning is ‘have an unnatural death in the golden country’. Here the slang phrases mean ‘go to hell

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<sup>203</sup> Russell and Lewis, *The Jew in London*, 188–91.

<sup>204</sup> For many years the American *Forverts* published a ‘Gallery of Vanished Men’, and a national desertion bureau was set up in New York. Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers: The Lives of Jewish Immigrant Women*, 110. See also Reena Sigman Friedman, ‘“Send Me My Husband Who Is in New York City”: Husband Desertion in the American Jewish Immigrant Community 1900-1926’, *Jewish Social Studies* 44, no. 1 (1982): 1–18.

<sup>205</sup> The Jewish Board of Guardians and the Russo-Jewish Committee ‘repeatedly announced that they would not aid “deserted wives” who had connived at “desertion” with their husbands.’ However, numerous small charities helped. Lloyd Gartner, ‘Women in the Great Jewish Migration’, *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 40 (2005): 131. The Jewish Board of Guardians’ periodic allowances for sickness and short term emergencies included deserted wives together with young widows, orphans, deserted children and women with husbands in gaol or asylum. Lipman, *Social Service*, 117–8. The lack of support would lead some women in desperate poverty to turn to prostitution. Marks, ‘Race, Class and Gender’, 44.

<sup>206</sup> For the issue of abandoned wives within the English host community, see Marjorie Levine-Clark, ‘From “Relief” to “Justice and Protection”: The Maintenance of Deserted Wives, British Masculinity and Imperial Citizenship, 1870-1920’, *Gender & History* 22, no. 2 (2010): 302–21.

<sup>207</sup> Peña, *Texas-Mexican Conjunto*, 13.

in England’).<sup>208</sup> Although the song clearly sides with Khaye-sore’s position, there is humour in these uncontrolled rhymed lines as she loses her temper, and the swear words *mise meshine* are contrasted with the elevated term *goldene medine*, a phrase rarely used positively.<sup>209</sup> Despite the tragic tale, England is shown as the future.

Markovitch often wrote sentimental ballads which closely paralleled lived experience. The cultural work of these songs was to change the atmosphere quickly. The music-hall programme would run a comic vulgar turn next to a serious and sad song. The fusion of laughter and tears became a hallmark of Yiddish theatre and music hall where audiences were expected to seamlessly move between emotions.<sup>210</sup> The combination of serious themes and pantomimic silliness can be seen particularly clearly in songs that describe domestic violence as a response to the immigrant experience. Domestic violence is dealt with both with gravitas and humour, and sometimes combining the two.

In rabbinic exegesis different interpretations of Jewish law concerned the issue of what was termed ‘wife-beating’. Biale describes the spectrum of opinions from rabbis who saw domestic violence as wholly unacceptable and a divorce should be given, to those who saw it as an acceptable punishment meted out by a man to his wife for ‘serious offences’. Even famous rabbis such as Caro and Maimonides accepted ‘limited beatings’ in service of controlling the family.<sup>211</sup> Historian Ellen Ross explains that in the working-class English context ‘community behaviour in wife-beating incidents certainly acknowledged the inevitability of violence between spouses, and the “right” of husbands to beat up their wives.’<sup>212</sup>

Songs around domestic violence vary considerably in tone. Yozef’s song ‘Er meynt yenem nit zikh aleyn’ (He Means Everyone Except Himself) tells of domestic violence in the context of hypocrisy. The song exposes a man who says one thing and does another. He berates other men for their lack of honesty and generosity, but does not set

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<sup>208</sup> The term *goldene medine* comes up more often in American songs.

<sup>209</sup> Slobin, *Tenement Songs*, 157.

<sup>210</sup> Yiddish actress Anna Tselniker describes her father Meier Tselniker’s attitude that the Yiddish theatre should have ‘*A zing, a lach un a trer* (a song, a laugh and a tear). If they don’t hear a song, have a good laugh and cry their eyes out, all at the same time, they don’t get their money’s worth.’ Anna Tselniker, *Three for the Price of One* (London: The Spiro Institute, 1991), 9.

<sup>211</sup> Biale, *Women and Jewish Law*, 93–5.

<sup>212</sup> Ross, ‘Fierce Questions’, 233.

himself by the same standard. In the final verse he condemns another man who curses his wife, yet the narrator goes home and beats his own wife. The lyrics are harsh:

*On rakhmones shlogt er ir  
oyf yedn trit shenkt der bandit  
zayn shvabe froy petsh on a shir*

Without mercy he hits her  
With every step, the bandit gives  
His German wife endless slaps.<sup>213</sup>

Only the chorus line, which is the title, moves the song into black humour. Although no reference is made to England, Yozef was writing for the London-Yiddish audience and this was a part of the community's dirty linen.

Songs rarely touch on domestic violence unless it is to prove a point. And the song 'A boytshik ap to deyt', mentioned earlier in this chapter, has an additional twist. Lize Klaf saves her dowry to marry well, but the English 'swell' she married did not prove a good husband, beating her *grin un gel* (equivalent to black and blue).<sup>214</sup> The song attributes this behaviour to the new husband being a Gentile Englishman. The cautionary tale's message is simple: do not marry a fashionable suave Gentile because if you do, you'll get what an Englishman does, he beats his wife. The fact that the song was a cautionary tale did not seem to lessen its popularity, it may, indeed, have contributed to it. The song may not be suggesting that all Gentiles beat their wives, but it does suggest that even music-hall songs exerted a cultural force to marry a Jew. The song uses the threat of domestic violence as a way of wielding community control. Englishness is reinforced by a string of anglicised words, mostly slang: *mesher*, *toff*, *bluff* and *ap to deyt*. The title word *boytshik* comes from the English word 'boy' and the Yiddish diminutive *tshik*. These anglicisms reinforce the idea that one must not be seduced by the temptation of the dominant culture.

The immigrant community's status quo may not be rocked, yet it can be criticised and this is sometimes done through subversion. When a wife beats her husband it is portrayed as pantomime. In a verse of 'Der dansing skul' a husband 'endlessly' complains that 'she hits me for no reason' and 'tears pieces from my body.' The slapstick humour comes from the seeming absurdity of a husband becoming a victim of domestic violence and crying like a child. To similar effect the disempowered and

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<sup>213</sup> M. Yozef, 'Er meynt yenem nit zikh aleyn', *LK*, 32. The word *shvabe* (German) is pejorative.

<sup>214</sup> Literal meaning is 'green and yellow'.

cuckolded husband of the song ‘Vos geyst nisht aheym sore gitl?’ (Won’t You Come Home Sore-gitl?) threatens to beat his wayward wife with stock theatrical violence:

*Ikh tsubrekh dir a beyn  
hak oys dayne tseyn  
makh fun dir a bild in a freym*

I’ll break your bones  
Smash your teeth  
And make you into a framed picture.<sup>215</sup>

Yet he is ineffective, made to look like a child having a tantrum, and as such does not threaten any danger, other than his own sense of manhood. These two songs, using the theme of domestic violence, infantilise the husbands. Rather than make serious points about domestic violence, they show the emasculation of an immigrant man struggling to retain his sense of being the head of the household.

Songs dealing with domestic violence within marriage may open a space for naming bad behaviour within the Yiddish-speaking community. They may question the roles of men and women while offering a cathartic release for marriage tensions. These songs are edgy, even dangerous, and are a place to flaunt dirty linen in private.

### ***Helo, helo: the extra-marital ‘lodger’***

Safer was simply to use the well-worn comedy about adultery. The majority of sexual references in the Anglo-Yiddish music-hall songs implied that sex with the object of your desire was more fun as an extra-marital affair. The songs repeatedly depict comic scenes of the other man creeping in and out of windows when the husband is away. This type of clowning was not new on the English music-hall scene, yet it moves into new sexual territory here.<sup>216</sup> Although, in Jewish law, sex between single people does not carry a prohibition, adultery is the seventh of the ten commandments. It was considered adultery if a married woman had sexual relations with any man other than her husband. For a Jewish man, however, it was only considered adultery if the sexual relations were with a married woman. Although frowned on by the rabbis, sexual relations between married men and single women was not considered adultery.<sup>217</sup> However, the

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<sup>215</sup> Nager, ‘Vos geyst nisht aheym sore gitl’, *LK*, 16. The title reads sore git. This may be a typo or a title too long for the page. It may be wordplay on *git* meaning ‘good’. The sung phrase is always Sore gitl.

<sup>216</sup> The popular comic character Ally Sloper portrays a cartoon of a ‘minor deviant’ who plays the field, although he may be married. He operates ‘on the fringes of legality’. This character in some ways had more freedom than the similar cartoon-style characters depicted in the English music hall. Peter Bailey, ‘Ally Sloper’s Half-Holiday: Comic Art in the 1880s’, in *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 16 (Oxford Univ Press, 1983), 11.

<sup>217</sup> In Jewish law polygamy was allowed, though forbidden by later rabbis. Biale, *Women and Jewish Law*, 183–4.

immigrants had to abide by English law. In the 1857 divorce law, adultery was grounds for a divorce, and in English law any extra-marital sex by men or women was considered adultery. Here too there were double standards: although a man could divorce his wife for any one instance of adultery, a woman had to prove both adultery and a 'matrimonial offence' such as cruelty, desertion, bigamy or incest. By the 1880s acts had been passed so that women could claim their own money and get custody of their children on divorce. Yet for poor people, divorce was rarely an option.<sup>218</sup>

So it may seem as if the constant references to adultery with married women in Yiddish music-hall songs is surprising, as if the songs are condoning it. For any woman who felt trapped in an unhappy marriage, hearing comedy about adultery may well have brought a mixed emotional response. Many immigrants going to the music hall would have only recently become non-religious, and for some, secularisation may have been ideological and the music hall could signify a sign of independence from religious strictures. For others there may have been discomfort or guilt at abandoning religious mores, and the music hall bringing together similar people may have been comforting. However, even for the anarchist exponents of free love, adultery was not seen as positive, so the humour had an edge.<sup>219</sup> Singing about adultery may have allowed married people to let off steam and laugh at the stresses of daily married life, difficulties or inadequacies in their marriages, or for men to deal with missing wives they had left behind in Eastern Europe. One technique the songs used in making fun of marriage and extra-marital affairs was the stock music-hall comic character of the lodger.<sup>220</sup>

Vast numbers of people had lodgings in London and many of them were young male immigrants. At the same time as Jewish immigrants were greatly increasing the population in the East End of London, there was a decline in housing and a raising of rent. Streets of slums had been cleared and warehouses and factories erected.<sup>221</sup> Model blocks of flats had been built in place of the slums, however this provided fewer homes

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<sup>218</sup> Hall, *Sex, Gender*, 10–12. See also Levine-Clark, 'Relief to Justice', 303–8.

<sup>219</sup> Some anarchists adhered to the philosophy of free love. Free love argued for sexual relationships outside marriage, where the state could not interfere. Promiscuity, however, was not condoned. Conservative journalists sensationalised it claiming that it was 'the spectre of dangerous promiscuity haunting established society'. Hall, *Sex, Gender*, 130, 59. Anarchist leader Rudolph Rocker described in his memoirs how in 1898 he and his partner Milly Witkop were stopped from entering the United States as they had no marriage certificate. See Rocker and Ward, *London Years*, 42.

<sup>220</sup> The word *lodzher* is only used in Anglo-Yiddish songs. American Yiddish songs use the word *border*. In the song 'Mayn vayb' (My Wife) the lyric reads '*border (lodzher)*', offering alternate lyrics for different locations.

<sup>221</sup> Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 126.



at higher rent.<sup>222</sup> Immigrants who wanted to live in the Yiddish-speaking enclave had to pay the higher rents and ‘key money’. This led to people living in over-crowded buildings, sharing a few rooms, sub-letting and taking in lodgers.<sup>223</sup> The stream of young male immigrants meant that there were plenty of lodgers to be had.

The ‘lodger’ was a familiar stock character in English music hall songs. ‘Our Lodger’s Such A Nice Young Man’, written in 1897 for the singer Vesta Victoria, tells of a naïve daughter describing how the family lodger helps everyone out, but in particular her mother.<sup>224</sup> A similar comic figure appears in Yiddish songs, where the lodger is mostly a source of flirtation and sexual dalliance for the married landlady. In ‘Gevalt es iz a shlekhte tsayt’ (Help it is a Terrible Time), a young wife of an older man has a lodger for ‘fun’. In ‘Der dzob’ (The Job), the husband goes out to work and the lodger rocks the (his) baby in the cradle. In ‘Aheym tsurik’ (Back Home), the lodger does not even pay rent, yet gets the best steak as well as sexual favours. In ‘Fri ov tshardzh’ (Free of Charge), the lodger gets the nicest room and finest bed and when the husband leaves the house the lodger gets ‘tiddle idl lomtom /totally free of charge.’ In ‘London hot zikh ibergekert’ the husband sleeps on the floor and the lodger in the bed. In all of these songs the landlady gets the last laugh and the butt of the jokes is the husband.<sup>225</sup>

Yet not only is the husband mocked, but also the lodger. Rather than the lodger as seducer, he becomes objectified and a figure of fun, often naïvely responding to the greater experience of the landlady. In the hands of the Jewish songwriters, jibes were easily made at the expense of the young, male, naïve, orthodox immigrant. In ‘Freg kayn katshanes, es iz england’ (Don’t ask Silly Questions, this is England), the orthodox lodger with his hat and sidelocks is horrified when he is left alone in the room with a woman who is not part of his family, his landlady. The orthodox strictures against being alone with a woman were just for this reason, as she seduces him. The humour is directed at the lodger who is seen as naïve, not only in matters of sex, but in wanting to

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<sup>222</sup> For an example of the Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings Company’s model housing scheme see White, *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block 1887-1920*, 4–30.

<sup>223</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen*, 182. The Housing shortage was exacerbated by the fact that immigrants worked mainly as unskilled labour in workshops with irregular hours, so requiring both worker and masters to live in the East End, and masters often used a room in the house as a workshop. *Ibid.*, 174, 179.

<sup>224</sup> Fred Murray and Laurence Barclay, ‘Our Lodger’s Such A Nice Young Man’. Davison, *Songs of the British Music Hall*, 135. Other popular English music-hall songs of the period included ‘Flanigan the Lodger’, B. W. Hitchcock, 1885, sung by Pat Rooney; ‘We Saved it for the Lodger’, Lester Barrett and Felix McGlennon, 1889; ‘The Wife, the Lodger and I’, Harry Wincott and Harry Leighton, 1902.

<sup>225</sup> ‘Gevalt es iz a shlekhte tsayt’, *SY*; Nager, ‘Der dzob’, *LK*, 9–11; Markovitch, ‘Aheym tsurik’, unpublished manuscript; ‘Fri ov tshardzh’, *LLM*, 12–13.

maintain the modesty of orthodox Jewish law in England. In these songs sexual misbehaviour becomes an exemplification of the freedom of England.<sup>226</sup>

The sense these songs offer of the lodger being an unwilling plaything may have reflected an element of truth. Being a lodger was a precarious life where the family held control of the day to day living arrangements, and the accommodation was very basic. The Yiddish music-hall audience, mainly young, mainly male, may have felt that they were, indeed, powerless in their living arrangements. In his memoir Zelig Oberman, a married orthodox man relates his experience with his over-friendly landlady, who tries to make him take her to the pantomime at the Pavilion theatre. He refused to go, but she was insistent. Oberman claims ‘the whole business became horrible.’<sup>227</sup>

The frequency of the lodger appearing in song lyrics suggests that there is something going on in the migration experience that is connected to masculinity and power. When the lodger cuckolds a husband, it implies that through migration a man has lost his potency. He works in a sweatshop, but cannot support his family or pay the rent without the additional financial help from taking in a lodger. The husband has had to give up everything, including his wife, in order to be successful as a breadwinner.

This choice is shown clearly in Markovitsh’s ‘Moyshe kum efn mir dem shlos’ (Moses come and unlock it). Here, the wife is running around looking for her husband who has left her because she has been accepting favours from his boss. She swears undying love as long as he comes back with the key for the boxes of expensive trinkets that her lover had given her.<sup>228</sup> Again, the husband is seen as powerless, yet this time there is a class dimension. The lover may be a Jew, but also a master, which leaves the husband trapped. He cannot compete or it would mean the loss of his livelihood. The only choice he is given in the narrative is to run away with the keys to the trinkets. The only way he can make his wife desire him is to take control over access to her lovers’ gifts.

This song was a part of the repertoire of Beki Goldshteyn. Goldshteyn was a favourite on the London Yiddish stage, here taking the role of a flustered, anxious, yet unfaithful wife. The audience’s laughter would not only have been at the comic antics in the

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<sup>226</sup> Nager, ‘Freg kayn katshanes’, *LLM*, 9–10.

<sup>227</sup> Oberman, *In mayne teg*, 92.

<sup>228</sup> Markovitsh, ‘Moyshe kum efn mir dem shlos’, *LK*, 93–5.

performance, but also at watching their local celebrity performing it. The relationship between Goldshteyn and her fans, with their response of laughter and shouts, was crucial to the success of the performance. 'Knowingness' creates some of the power in the relationship between actor and audience as she winks and nods and grins in the right places, offering a foil to the harassed and exhausted housewife who must have guffawed at the idea that she could have enough time, amid child-rearing and looking after the family home, to have an affair. However, one could also attribute an additional aspect to the relationship between Becky and her male fans. Bailey's theory of 'parasexuality' is an analysis of the English barmaid in the mid nineteenth century. The barmaid, female and attractive in a mainly male environment, became a focus of men's sexual feelings in a way that was distanced and safe. Because public and visible to others, and not proprietary, no one man had a monopoly on her attentions. 'Parasexuality' referred to the relationship between the flirting barmaid and the men drinking in the pub. It is 'sexuality that is deployed but contained, carefully channelled rather than fully discharged; in vulgar terms it might be represented as "everything but".' Bailey argues that parasexuality could be seen as a 'threat to established values', however the limits were 'flexed' rather than 'transgressed'.<sup>229</sup> Bailey describes the barmaid as playing a character on a stage. This theory resonates for female performers in the smaller halls where the actress is close enough to be a parasexual conduit. The atmosphere is heightened when the material performed is of a sexual nature. For female actors it was more precarious than the barmaid, because the limits were often transgressed in the fictional narratives. However, in contrast to the pub, the audience included more women, so it also allowed the charged feeling to resonate amongst the audience.

Given the nature of this material, it is no surprise that the orthodox immigrant community of the East End railed against the Yiddish theatre and music hall and wanted to limit their activities. The tension existing between the religious and secular led to satirical songs which made merciless fun of the orthodox. 'Laytudl laytudl day day' (vocalisation like 'tiddly om pom pom') was a comic ditty that lampooned *halakhic* (Jewish law) notions of what constitutes adultery and respect for rabbinic teachings. It was written, at least in part, by East End publisher Yozef Mokher Sforim.<sup>230</sup> The second verse of six tells of a woman who goes to her rabbi for advice on what to do. Her

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<sup>229</sup> Peter Bailey, 'Parasexuality and Glamour: The Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype', *Gender & History* 2, no. 2 (1990): 148–9.

<sup>230</sup> Yozef, 'Laytudl laytudl day day', *SY*, NLI. Prager calls the first verses of this song 'vulgar and stupid'. Prager, *Farleger*, 196.

husband is demanding a divorce, in accordance with *halakhic* law, on account of her not having had any children.<sup>231</sup> As it was the rabbi's job to find a solution to this problem, he tells the woman not to worry, just come into the other room with him, and nine months later *laytudl laytudl day day*. This song openly satirised religion on a number of levels, creating a powerful subtext. The satire was directed against rabbinic authority. Firstly, rabbis, in particular *hasidic* rabbis, would hold court for their congregation where they would judge disputes supposedly with divine inspiration. Second, was the intimation of sexual abuse within the rabbinate. The third poured scorn on the Jewish law that showed procreation as more important than love. These layers were known. An explanation of the content was unnecessary for the music-hall audience because it was a part of the insider knowledge of Yiddish culture.

Although most of the humour in these songs comes from the married woman having a lover, there are times where the narrative also has the husband with a lover. In the song 'Helo, helo', the husband takes a lover because his wife is having an affair. He confronts her in the upwardly-mobile area of Stamford Hill:

*Helo, helo!*  
*Shrayt zi, 'oy ver iz zi?'*  
*Zogt er 'ikh hob getun azoy vi di'*  
*vos zogstu mayn vaybele dertsi*  
*helo, helo!*

Hello hello!  
 She shouts 'Oy who is she?'  
 He says 'I've done the same as you'  
 What do you say to that then my wife  
 Hello, hello!<sup>232</sup>

Generally a married man having an affair is not considered funny unless his wife finds him and a row or a beating ensues. In this instance, the humour is in the fictionally ubiquitous adulterous woman getting her comeuppance, though only partially because the husband is still a cuckold and simply clawing back a bit of his power. In addition, setting the scene of adultery in the upwardly mobile Stamford Hill adds a class dimension to the nuance of the song. The verse contrasts with the previous verse which described poverty in Whitechapel's Commercial Street, implying that as one moves up in the world, morality goes awry.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> *Halakhic* law allows a man to sue for divorce if there are no children after ten years of marriage. Freeze, *Jewish Marriage*, 138–40.

<sup>232</sup> *Hello, Hello*, performed by Bertha Jackson (London: Unpublished recording by Derek Reid, 1978), Cassette tape.

<sup>233</sup> Whitechapel is in the heart of the East End Yiddish ghetto. Stamford Hill was one location of upward mobility, around four miles north of the East End.

## Sexual Exploitation

### *Der bal-tovnik: sexual abuse*

Although marriage difficulties could be laughed at in the music halls, the humour changed when sex became abusive. Many immigrants who had settled in London helped their extended families in Eastern Europe by bringing over relations to set them up with new lives in England. The song 'Der bal-tovnik' (The Do-Gooder), adapted by Nager for a London audience, tells a tale about hypocrisy. The ironically named Mr Tsadik (Mr righteous), known and honoured by the immigrant community, uses the pretext of doing good to fulfil his own sexual desires.<sup>234</sup> He pays for a female relation of his wife to come from Eastern Europe to England. She is indebted to him for the travel, board and lodging and works for him for a slave-labour amount of one shilling a week.<sup>235</sup> The debt mounts with his gifts of clothes and shoes and when he demands sexual favours she is in no position to refuse. The righteousness of Mr Tsadik is transformed into exploitation. Mr Tsadik is a powerful man, so that when pregnancy is the outcome of his sexual act, the do-gooder quietly calls a doctor who sorts it out. This song seems to shame without naming and challenges any nostalgic preconception of immigrant life.

### *Orem vey: prostitution*

It is immigration, moving countries, that gives the opportunity for this sort of abuse. Indeed, the movement of girls for sex was an established and well structured trade. William Stead may have exposed the systems of prostitution in London in 1885, yet still, by the turn of the century, the white slave trade was far reaching and established and Jewish involvement was prominent.<sup>236</sup> Naomi Shepherd argues that Jewish prostitutes were 'abhorred' by the community rather than pitied, and when a Jewish woman 'strayed' she would not be readmitted to the community.<sup>237</sup> This view is somewhat tempered by Mile End's Charcroft House in Mile End which was a 'lodging house' for 'foreign Jewesses', set up by Lady Battersea and Emma de Rothschild of the Anglo-

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<sup>234</sup> Isaac Reingold, Nager (adapted), 'Der bal-tovnik', *LK*, 8-9. Reingold was a prolific poet and lyricist. Nager's adaptation is close to the original, changing some words and currency to British equivalents.

<sup>235</sup> Meyer and Black considers the very worst wages for East End women in 1909 were 1d an hour, which would make around 6s a week. Carl Meyer and Clementina Black, *Makers of Our Clothes: A Case for Trade Boards, Being the Results of a Year's Investigation Into the Work of Women in London in the Tailoring, Dressmaking, and Underclothing Trades* (London: Duckworth and Company, 1909), 71. See also Tananbaum, *Immigrants in London*, 151-3.

<sup>236</sup> Bristow, *Prostitution, Prejudice*, 17-42.

<sup>237</sup> Jews were prominent both in the traffic of girls and women and in organizations to combat the trade. Shepherd, *Price Below Rubies*, 227-9.

Jewish establishment to help first-time ‘fallen women’.<sup>238</sup> Prostitution had existed in *shtetl* communities, as Susan Glenn argues:

Lower still in status than domestic servants, and harder to count, were the prostitutes. Usually associated with big city life, the *burdak* (brothel) provided a source of income for poor Jewish women in the villages as well. As one Jewish immigrant from Galicia remarked, “Sure we had a brothel. What shtetl and town didn’t?”<sup>239</sup>

The world of Jewish prostitution and Jewish involvement in the white slave trade, as part of Jewish life, was not infrequently sung about in the music halls.<sup>240</sup> Although sometimes a prominent theme in Yiddish plays and songs, in the Anglo-Yiddish song repertoire the references are tucked away and only alluded to by a word or two. Yet, key words were easily spotted if you had insider knowledge and the audience could pick up the clues. In Nager’s ‘Viktorye park’, amongst a host of roughly described characters is a reference to a Jewish prostitute:

*Dort geyt khaye-ite a moyd fun lite  
zi iz di drite zi voynt in site.*

There goes Khaye-Eta, a woman from Lithuania  
She is the third, she lives in the city.<sup>241</sup>

Khaye-ita’s Jewishness is clearly shown in her name and where she comes from. The intimation that she is a prostitute is only alluded to indirectly in the lyric. Firstly, she is referred to as ‘the third’, which is likely to be a reference to Winchevsky’s poem ‘Dray shvester’ (Three Sisters) where the third sister was the prostitute in Leicester Square. ‘Dray shvester’ was a popular song and, as a creative reference point for Nager, it also serves to reinforce the London backdrop of prostitution. Arn Nager was the most prolific of the published London music-hall songwriters, and the majority of his material uses sexual innuendo and vulgarities, layering occluded references into his lyrics.<sup>242</sup> The allusion to prostitution is reinforced by the reference to Khaye-ite living ‘in the city’. The City of London bordered on to the East End though few if any Jewish immigrants lived there. Situated between the East End and the West End with the proximity to city businessmen, ‘living in the City’ makes the connection to being a (possibly higher class) prostitute. The innuendo of the lyric was communicated through

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<sup>238</sup> See Knepper, ‘Racialisation of Crime’, 61–79; Lara Marks, ‘The Luckless Waifs and Strays of Humanity: Irish and Jewish Immigrant Unwed Mothers in London, 1870-1939’, *Twentieth Century British History* 3, no. 2 (1992): 124–6. Charcroft House later moved to Shepherd’s Bush.

<sup>239</sup> Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 17.

<sup>240</sup> Performances in English on this theme packed London music halls. Bristow, *Prostitution, Prejudice*, 41.

<sup>241</sup> Nager, ‘Viktorye park’.

<sup>242</sup> Prager, *Yiddish Culture*, 478.

performance. Folksong collector Derek Reid recounted his experience of hearing Bertha Jackson sing ‘Viktorye park’, and how she showed the allusion to prostitution:

I should explain that some of my interpretations are taken from the subtleties of lift in the voice with which the singer – with a twinkle in her eye – implies sauce. Such things cannot be communicated on the written page.<sup>243</sup>

The performer may have used a ‘twinkle’ to get the desired response of acknowledging that Khaye-ita was, indeed, a prostitute, but Nager does not seem to be making any social comment here other than building up a mixture of mainly Jewish characters to show the breadth of people using Victoria Park. The song may imply that Victoria Park was a location for Jewish prostitution, however the character of Khaye-ite is drawn without the coarse descriptions of most of the other characters in the park.

Nager takes a different perspective in ‘Vos geyst nisht aheym sore gitl?’ (Won’t You Come Home Sore-gitl). Here the reference to prostitution is to a man’s wife. The song is narrated by a husband running around looking for his wayward wife. In the first verse he finds her in Regent Street flirting with other men. In the second verse he is told that she is often seen with ‘a nice robust *goy*’ (Gentile man) in pubs drinking and kissing.<sup>244</sup> The depiction of sexual behaviour in this song is more open than in ‘Viktorye park’. The song does not explicitly state that the character Sore-gitl is having sex for money, however there are two references that suggest prostitution. The first is the mention of Regent Street. Regent Street alludes to single young shopgirls in the large West End department stores, becoming independent, moving out of their parents’ homes and out from under the thumb of the patriarch, and making a little extra money through prostitution. This may have imperilled young women, but also empowered them.<sup>245</sup> In 1887, there was a famous case where Elizabeth Cass, newly in London and working in the West End, was falsely arrested for soliciting in Regent Street.<sup>246</sup> Regent Street was long associated with prostitution and in a cartoon from 1871 entitled *An Awkward Encounter in Regent Street* a respectable middle-class couple bump into a prostitute who is clearly on good terms with the husband.<sup>247</sup> So Regent Street is no occluded reference, but clearly suggestive. The second reference to prostitution is Sore-gitl’s

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<sup>243</sup> Reid, ‘Six Yiddish Street Songs’, 106.

<sup>244</sup> Nager, ‘Sore gitl?’.

<sup>245</sup> Pamela Cox and Annabel Hobley, *Shopgirls: The True Story of Life Behind the Counter* (London: Random House, 2014), 54–60.

<sup>246</sup> Bland, *Banishing Beast*, 119.

<sup>247</sup> ‘An Awkward Encounter in Regent Street’, *The Day’s Doings*, 24 June 1871. Mary Evans Picture Library. Reproduced in Jeremy Paxman, *The Victorians: Britain Through the Paintings of the Age* (London: BBC Books, 2010), 126.

‘making out’ with Gentile men in a *publik hoyz*. This openly brazen behaviour would not have been fitting for a married Jewish girl, and could only have been seen as the actions of a prostitute. The term *public hoyz* may be used to mean pub in Cockney-Yiddish, but in Eastern European Yiddish it also refers to a brothel.

The songsheet of ‘Vos geyst nisht aheym sore gitl?’ states the song should be sung to the tune of ‘Won’t You Come Home Bill Bailey?’, a popular ragtime tune by Hughie Cannon written in 1902. On one level, using a familiar Western tune shows the powerful connection made to the local host culture. However, it is not that simple a connection. Martin Stokes argues that ‘musicians in many parts of the world have a magpie attitude towards genres, picked up, transformed and reinterpreted in their own terms.’<sup>248</sup> This seems to ring true for this re-appropriation of ‘Bill Bailey’ as the changes to the original are significant to the immigrant experience. In ‘Bill Bailey’, the wife tries to get her errant husband to come home, yet in Nager’s song, the male and female roles are inverted. This role reversal makes some claim to displaying the immigrant community as an ‘other’, as topsy-turvy where men are emasculated. The song’s comedy lies in the weakness and inability of the husband to assert his rights. It not only plays on men’s fear of losing their position as head of the household, but in this scenario the reference to prostitution lies between a challenge to male power and a threat to the family.

A song that moves even further into ‘dirty linen’ territory is ‘Orem vey iz der mamen’ (Poverty/ Woe is The Mother).<sup>249</sup> The song is also set in Victoria Park. It refers obliquely to the White Slave Trade, and suggests significant Jewish involvement. The characters are men sitting on a bench smoking and pronouncing mocking comments on the world around them in an array of languages: Yiddish, German, English, Turkish, Russian, Romanian, French, Italian, Spanish and Greek. These languages may refer to immigrant groups or sailors or international criminals. Whoever they are, they are a rather threatening group of men. They make fun of a young woman walking past dressed in the latest French fashion, laughing at her features and clothing. The final verse describes a rich ‘father’ who lets his pretty ‘daughter’ stand outside the *publik hoyz* flirting with Gentile louts while he calculates her smiles and caresses to his

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<sup>248</sup> Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity*, 16.

<sup>249</sup> ‘Orem vey iz der mamen’, S. *Orem vey* is hard to translate as it is a wordplay. *Oy vey* means ‘oh dear’, but the word *oy* is substituted by *orem* which means poverty.



advantage. The song is obliquely written full of euphemisms according to which ‘father’ seems to mean pimp, and ‘daughter’ may imply child sex as well as trafficking. It is difficult to see the humour of this song on the page, yet the byline on the songsheet reads: ‘Sung by our beloved comic singer Rubin Dokter.’ It can only be guessed at why child prostitution may be a subject for comedy, yet with the sensationalist media described earlier it could be masquerading as a parody, it could be meant to be shocking. The difference between this song and the previous references to prostitution is the ominous sense of danger, which may have had different impacts for men and women in the audience. Although the female characters in ‘Sore gitl’ and ‘Viktorye park’ seem to be in more independent positions, the women in ‘Orem vey is der mamen’ are victims.<sup>250</sup>

A final allusion to prostitution can be seen as humour, but with a sinister edge. Instead of the naïve lodger as dalliance for the married landlady, the lodger is transformed into a danger to the family’s daughters.<sup>251</sup> The humour comes from inverting the fear of one’s daughters being molested to using them as bait to find lodgers. The song ‘Rum to let’ offers a narrative where lodgers are fed up of being insulted with a bad reputation and decide to go on strike. They give up being lodgers and get married, leaving the landladies bereft. So notices are put up advertising rooms to let with all sorts of incentives, eggs, fish, kisses, and the daughters at a bargain price.<sup>252</sup>

Songs alluding to prostitution may have heightened the already sexualised atmosphere of the halls. If there were prostitutes in the audience it may have added to the ambient feeling, allowing men to respond by seeing sex as a possibility.

## Conclusion

The Anglo-Yiddish music-hall songs pertaining to sex can be seen as symptomatic of a rapidly changing society. Although Eastern European society was also changing, the

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<sup>250</sup> The German Jewish feminist movement, the *Judischer Frauenbund*, was set up in 1904 by feminist activist writer Bertha Pappenheim. They saw women as enslaved by pimps or poverty and viewed all prostitutes as white slaves even if no traffickers were implicated. Marion Kaplan, ‘Prostitution, Morality Crusades and Feminism: German-Jewish Feminists and the Campaign against White Slavery’, in *Women’s Studies International Forum*, vol. 5 (Elsevier, 1982), 622.

<sup>251</sup> Markovitsh relates how hard it was to find lodgings in London because he was a music-hall artist. When the man of one house was told that he was not a tightrope walker, but an educated man, he responded: ‘That’s even worse. You’ve got to be careful with these learned types... they’ve got no sense of values – what we think is *treyf* (unclean), they think is kosher!’. Markovitsh, ‘50 yor’, *IS*, 4 December 1953.

<sup>252</sup> Nager, ‘Rum to let’, *LK*, 103.

songs allude to changes brought on by immigration. In the traditional Jewish culture of Eastern Europe religion had a privileged role and structured relationships, giving definition and containment to sexual contact. When these structures were removed, immigrants had to invent new sexual mores.

The fall from the heights of Eastern European orthodoxy had left a big gap in peoples' lives, and the Yiddish music hall was happy to offer coarse humour and naughty fun at the expense of the orthodox and the delight of the secular. The Yiddish halls provided a cultural milieu where men and women could meet freely, let off steam and laugh at rarely shared sexual experiences. The songs' lyrics, performance and audience interaction created a sexually charged atmosphere that allowed the halls to become places for courtship, where young unmarried people could meet and socialise, and feelings of desire were given a space they could not have in daily life. It allowed married members of the audience to disappear into a fantasy world, where humour may have provided relief from married hardship, before returning to the daily tensions of their ordinary lives. It allowed matters such as marital abuse and prostitution to be discussed in an environment which welcomed cathartic responses in laughter and tears.

The frequent coded innuendo in these songs offered an opportunity where feelings around sex and desire could be displayed and explored with a lightness and humour characteristic of music-hall. This seems particularly apposite in a situation where peoples' identities were in flux with the change of location and world perspectives.

The songwriters took great pains to deliberately locate their songs in London or England. Songs allude to known places such as Crystal Palace, Victoria Park and Regent Street, and local political debates such as the problems of abandoned wives and the White Slave Trade. This begs the question as to why these songwriters wanted to ensure that their audience saw the subject of sex as specific to the *London*-immigrant experience. I suggest that the use of local referencing provides a sense of community, ownership, of sharing the experience and locating it in an internal space. Sex may be a universal experience, yet the anglicised songs offered a way to engage with difficulties in the reality of sex for immigrants in London. It offered immigrants a place to feel located as London-immigrants and not a satellite of the larger New York Diaspora. The English experience was an identity to be drawn on and draw comfort from sharing with others. The intimacy of sharing anxieties about sex and marriage, and the change in

men's and women's roles, could be made safer in a space which identified with some aspects of real lives of immigrants living in England.

In addition, we see that the Anglo-Yiddish music halls existed within the context of the long English music hall tradition. The songwriters wrote lyrics to English tunes, were influenced by English lyrics and melodies and they were subject to English laws and inspections. Yet the Yiddish music hall was an internal community space using an internal language. In this community sphere there was the opportunity to address edgy subjects, flaunting dirty linen in private and exposing internal problems that were a result of immigration to the *here* of the music hall in London and the *now* of being in an Anglo-immigrant audience. They could flaunt this dirty linen without being understood by the people who did not speak Yiddish.

These music-hall songs do not tell history with any faithful portrayal of lived sexual experiences. Instead, they help us imagine a crucial space in the immigrant community at that time. The analysis of these lyrics allows us to focus on a different sort of history, offering a facet that has not been examined by Jewish social historians. Popular culture is of huge importance in reflecting how important sex is in people's lives. The songs create a sense of community that enriches, transforms and nuances our current knowledge.

## Chapter 6: Manipulating Religion: in satire, song and socialism

“*Nisim*” *gresere un vunder*  
*zet men haynt a gantses yor...*  
*Dankt dem himl far di “nisim”,*  
*vos in “ist-end” kumen for.*

Today one can see great and wonderful miracles  
The whole year.  
Thank heaven for the miracles  
That happen in the East End.<sup>1</sup>

To the English outsider, religion may have seemed to unify all Jews living in England. However, from within the Jewish community, the nature of religious practice was controversial and orthodox Judaism was not homogenous in its practice. Adherence to particular orthodox practices or opposition to religious ideas was hotly debated, often bringing conflict and antagonism that permeated both sections of the community: Anglo-Jewry and the East End immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

The organisation of immigrant orthodox practice and controversy with Anglo-Jewish religious institutions has been well documented in the historiography.<sup>3</sup> And indeed, the Anglo-Yiddish songs and poems display some of these cultural controversies. Yet the popular texts bring out an aspect of religion that is missing from the minute books of Federation and United Synagogue meetings. The poems and songs stand outside of the mainstream immigrant religious structures, yet religious ideas and knowledge are deeply ingrained within them. Sometimes the texts criticise Anglo-Jewish orthodoxy, yet mostly they concern immigrants’ own religious practice. They lampoon the old fashioned religion of the *heym*. They accuse England of being a place where religious observance is under threat and they attempt to re-shape the nature of religious practice in a modern context. Although many texts refer to England and individual characters and debates, changes in religious practice and similar debates were happening across the Yiddish-speaking world. Thus the texts are generally transnational in their scope. This chapter argues that the texts portray the struggle around religion. They offer insight into concerns around religion at a popular level because they oppose, criticise or celebrate both a changing religious life and a growing non-religious cultural Judaism. The chapter will analyse how the texts participated in different parts of religious debate, and in so

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<sup>1</sup> Avreml, ‘Al hanisim’, *Tsayt*, 26 December 2013.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the differences in religious practice, see Bernard Homa, *Orthodoxy in Anglo-Jewry, 1880-1940* (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1969), 8–24.

<sup>3</sup> Scholarship has concentrated on the difference between practice in the *khevres* (immigrant prayer rooms) and the large Anglo-Jewish synagogues. It focuses on the cultural clash between the two sections of the community and the ensuing battles around *shechita*, *kashres*, marriage and burial. For details, see the introduction, fn 7 and chapter 1: 53-7.

doing pushed the agenda for modernisation. The texts suggest that religion be re-appropriated to the contemporary world, or be discarded.

By the 1880s, Anglo-Jewry had developed anglicised synagogues, liturgy, and forms of clerical style and dress. They had created a Judaism that was both English and Jewish. The orthodox majority was led by the Chief Rabbinate and bound together in the United Synagogue with the remit to organise synagogues, burial and charitable relief. Yet there were diverse views. Some United Synagogue synagogues wanted to get rid of outmoded prayers and adapt others to be more forward-looking and modern. Outside of the United Synagogue, a small minority of Anglo-Jews had become part of the Reform movement in 1842, and Lily Montagu and Claude Montefiore established Liberal Judaism in England in 1902.

The religion of the Anglo-Jews stood in sharp contrast to the religion of the immigrants. The immigrant orthodox were from a different class and culture, and they brought their prayer customs with them from Eastern Europe. The immigrants' prayer was noisy, participatory and informal, taking place in small *khevres* rather than large synagogues. Yet, immigrant orthodoxy was also far from homogenous. There were immigrants who prayed three times a day in the strict orthodox practice of the Eastern European *shtetl* where there had been strong rabbinic leadership. Other immigrants came from towns in Eastern Europe where new ideas and radical politics were changing religious life and beliefs. The East End became a microcosm of sects and factions, some *hasidic*, some *misnagdim* (sect of orthodox Judaism opposed to *hasidim*), some connected to home-towns in Eastern Europe, and each with their own specific codes and customs.<sup>4</sup>

In an attempt to unite the larger *khevres* and immigrant synagogues and give them a voice within Anglo-Jewry, Samuel Montagu established the Federation of Synagogues. Yet not all wanted to join.<sup>5</sup> The *Makhzike hadas* was anxious that being part of anglicised Anglo-Jewish structures would bring a dilution of strictly orthodox practice. They, therefore, remained outside the Federation, arguing for tighter strictures in

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<sup>4</sup> Sharot, *Judaism*, 103–4. *Shtiblekh* are *hasidic kevres*. See Zelig Oberman's arduous quest for a place to pray in London suiting his *hasidic* background. Oberman, *In mayne teg*, 91, 98–100, 107.

<sup>5</sup> The Federation gave greater status and representation to the immigrant religious within an Anglo-Jewish context. It also created a position from which to bargain on issues around burial and *shechita*. See Alderman, *Federation of Synagogues*, 1–41; Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 175–80.

*kashres* (Kosher food) and *shechita* (ritual slaughter of animals). They were not adverse to some degree of anglicisation but only if it allowed orthodoxy to remain stringent.<sup>6</sup>

David Englander argues that the diversity the immigrant religion brought to England was positive because it ‘served to replenish the wells of orthodoxy.’ He claims that ‘their very divisions were indicative of Judaism’s continued strength and vitality’ because it showed that ‘religion still mattered.’<sup>7</sup> But it did not matter to everyone. Many immigrants lost some or all of their religious observance in the process of emigration, exacerbated by the pressure to work on the Sabbath.<sup>8</sup> These Jews might go to synagogue once a week or only on the High Holy Days. Other immigrants, converted to the ideas of socialism, became atheist and anti-religious.

The atheist socialists’ combative behaviour was seen as incitement and fiercely opposed by the religious from all parts of the community who united to fight them. There were attempts to shut down the *Arbayter fraynd*, and preachers such as the Kaminitze Rebbe were brought in to deliver sermons against socialism. The religious groups also combined in their opposition to the secular Yiddish theatre’s disregard of the Sabbath, the behaviour of Yiddish actors and the material performed in the Yiddish music hall, which was seen as antithesis to the religious moral code.

Despite the differences, conflict and lack of understanding between sections of the community, religion had a particular unifying factor. There was a substantial amount of commonality that stemmed from a knowledge of religious liturgy, text, rhythm of the Jewish year, festival customs and general knowledge connected to bible stories and general religious knowledge. Although it was interpretations of religious texts that often created different practice, the texts themselves were held in common. These texts, biblical, Talmudic or liturgical, were known and gave inspiration, contexts and structures to writers from different positions on the spectrum from orthodox to atheist. Non-religious immigrants had almost invariably come from religious families. Religious texts and terminology could be used as understandable and familiar benchmarks from which to create a subtext of allusions and lay the basis of topical and social comment.

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<sup>6</sup> Feldman argues that ‘It was not the goal of anglicisation that was rejected but its meaning that was disputed.’ Feldman, *Englishmen*, 336.

<sup>7</sup> Englander, ‘Anglicized’, 270.

<sup>8</sup> Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 146–7.

The religious conflicts debated in the Beth Din, synagogues and Jewish press were also recurring themes in Anglo-Yiddish poems and music-hall songs. The poets and songwriters took sides in debates, argued positions and commented on ongoing discussions. The major theme was how to relate religion to a modern-day England, and either abandon religion for other ideologies or modernise and anglicise orthodoxy to make it a part of English daily life. The use of religious language and terminology as ‘insider knowledge’ created layers of meaning and affect. Allusion to religious festivals, texts and ideas provided frameworks and metaphors which could produce humour and parody and could also be the most understandable way to put across an idea. The twenty-six texts analysed in this chapter come from writers from three different perspectives: socialist atheist poets writing for the socialist Yiddish press, non-religious songwriters writing for the music hall and traditionally religious poets writing for the mainstream Yiddish press.<sup>9</sup>

When socialist poetry used religion as a theme, it tended to berate the inequity and corruption of Anglo-Jewish rabbinical authority, analyzing how it was part of the capitalist system. The socialists saw religion as a ‘false consciousness’, and their poetry scorned prayer and belief in God as antiquated ideas. It suggested that religious belief and practice served as an opiate that caused political inactivity and offered no way out of poverty.<sup>10</sup> On one hand, the socialists wrote poems to propound their atheist philosophy. On the other hand, they were steeped in Jewish learning and used those structures as a way of both displaying their erudition and drawing in the worker to thinking more widely than the religious texts.

The music hall, with its edgy songs, was already a place that challenged religious mores, such as sexual contact outside marriage. Yet religion was a theme in music-hall songs which almost exclusively focused on narratives about the loss of religious practice in England. England is portrayed as a modern country of freedom and technological advances and in stark contrast to the old homeland. With different degrees of sympathy, these songs give voice and status to the reality of being a non-religious Jew in England. The Yiddish music halls thus provided a place where non-religious or non-practicing

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<sup>9</sup> There were a few poems in the *IE* from an orthodox perspective from writers outside England or unknown, such as Anon, ‘Al kheynt’, *IE*, 11 October 1910; Menakhem Dolitzki, ‘Der lulev’, *IE*, 17 October 1910.

<sup>10</sup> See David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (St Albans: Paladin, 1976), 80–90.

Jews could meet like-minded people, and a place they may have attended more regularly than the synagogue.

The most frequent use of religious concepts and language was in the satirical verse of poets who are generally from a mainstream religious but non-orthodox perspective. They wrote poems for festivals, using well-known ritual as an opportunity for criticism and comment. These poems are critical of internal religious wrangles. They do not criticise religion itself, but use religious themes as a basis for topical humour, satirical social comment and re-interpretation of traditional texts. The poems from traditionally religious writers can be seen as an attempt to create a modern observance that kept its orthodox feel, yet anglicised to modern ideas and mores. Religious terminology was simply a part of their poetic repertoire and used for a range of subject matter, not necessarily connected to religious themes.

### **Socialist Poetry: Scorning religious structures and belief in God**

Marx saw religion as a product of capitalism and argued that emancipation from capital would lead to emancipation from religion and religious oppression. Hence it was futile to focus on religion or seek tolerance (for Jews) – as against seeking revolution, to end the root cause. In his early writings, Marx wrote of the difference between political and human emancipation. Given that religious people still existed in emancipated countries, he argued that political emancipation may give civil rights, but did not bring the emancipation of a person's faculties and religious ideas. Instead, a free country offered greater freedom to be religious. The only way to be truly emancipated would be for an individual to get rid of the fantasy and see themselves as a social being, inseparable from political forces. This would lead to the abandonment of the false consciousness of religious ideas, and true emancipation would be possible.<sup>11</sup>

The Jewish socialists demanded that religion was given up in embracing socialist ideas. Thomas Eyges describes his conversion to radical politics in London in 1890:

To become a radical in those days, one had invariably first to abandon religious belief, to deny the existence of God. Then, as a matter of course, one became convinced of the uselessness of religious ceremonies, and then followed the abandonment of church or synagogue attendance. This was considered necessary in

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 80–9. McLellan's analysis comes from Karl Marx and David McLellan, *Early Texts* (California: Barnes & Noble, 1971), 91.



order to leave the mind free to consider life from a materialistic, rather than from a theological point of view.<sup>12</sup>

Anti-religious politicking often took the form of speeches, such as those at the union meeting that Eyges attended leading to his conversion. In addition, many articles and pamphlets were published by the radical press. In demanding a re-examination of the role of religion, socialist journalists used language from liturgy for effect, such as the headlines *hine yom-hadin* (Today is the Day of Judgment) or *unetane tokef* (Let Us Cede Power), around the time of the High Holy Days.<sup>13</sup> Words from the liturgy were a convenient marker or shorthand to describe a concept, and religion and God were re-engineered to become socialist tools. The Yiddish socialist poets also used and parodied religious texts, structures and concepts as a part of their poetic vocabulary. This may have been to draw the worker into making connections between religious ideas and socialist dogma. It may have been to display the writers' knowledge of religious ideas and texts, to show that the rejection of religion was not from a position of ignorance. It may have been, as described in chapter four, to attempt to include the religious worker in the creation of a broad workers' coalition. The use of familiar religious language by the socialists displayed the commonality of knowledge, if not of experience, between Jewish workers, whether currently religious or not.

Throughout their poetry Jewish socialists attacked religion in two main areas. Firstly they described the collusion they saw between the Anglo-Jewish religious authorities – the Chief Rabbinate – and the capitalist structure. This was epitomised by the Synagogue Parade of 1889, where the Chief Rabbi refused to make a statement about the appalling conditions of the sweating system. The socialists saw the sympathies of the Anglo-Jewish establishment as firmly lying with the masters and not with the workers.<sup>14</sup> The socialists' second area of attack was against belief in God. God was considered to be an anti-political concept, and religious practice an activity which mitigated against activism. The socialist poets attacked immigrant rabbis, who they believed held the East End orthodox in thrall to superstitions and unscientific ideas.

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<sup>12</sup> Eyges, *Horizon*, 75.

<sup>13</sup> *AF*, 31 August 1888; 14 September 1888. These are familiar words from key parts of the liturgy on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

<sup>14</sup> Poetry or song was an integral part of the parade. One leaflet for the parade announced that it would 'proceed with music'. Pollins, *Economic History*, 157.

### ***Arbeter kines: religious text becomes socialist dogma***

A penny pamphlet entitled *Kines oder arbayer klogelider* (Elegies or Workers' Laments) was published by the *Arbayer fraynd* printers in 1888.<sup>15</sup> The pamphlet contained two long elegies about the life of the worker in London. The content of the first concerns sweating conditions in the East End and the second poem focuses on the lack of unity amongst Jewish workers, and stresses the need to stand united.<sup>16</sup>

The title word *Kines* means dirges or elegies. The earliest *kines* were laments commemorating the destruction of the Temples of Jerusalem. The most famous *kine* is *megiles eykhe* (The Book of Lamentations), which is chanted to a mournful melody on the fast day of Tisha B'av. *Eykhe* is made up of five poems. The first four are written as acrostics with every verse starting with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, a common device in Hebrew prayer. A tradition developed of writing new *kines* about later tragedies that befell the Jewish community, so that a history of tragedy could be viewed through them.

The socialist *kines* of 1888 continue this tradition with the first poem using an acrostic form. The poems employ a significant amount of religious terminology and direct Hebrew quotations from *Eykhe*, including references to chapter and verse. Numerous religious concepts are referred to: the ritual expiation of sin before Yom Kippur; different levels of earth and hell; slavery in Egypt, and citing the biblical verse 'You should love your neighbour as yourself.'<sup>17</sup> Verse six of the poem asks a question about who leads workers, however the language is unusual. Rather than using the Yiddish word *firers* for leaders, it uses the biblical Hebraic *sarey khamishim un sarey asares* (leaders of fifty and leaders of ten). These terms are so specific, they hardly make sense in a socialist context, yet they give the concept of leadership a biblical dimension. The

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<sup>15</sup> Reuel, Yeser, Yisro, Khovav, Khever, Keini and Putiel, *Kines oder arbayer klogelider* (London: Workers Friend Printing Office, 1888).

<sup>16</sup> Parodies of prayers and religious observance was a common strategy for the anti-religious movement which started in London in 1885. Sharot, *Judaism*, 105. Parodies were particularly made of Passover haggadahs. See *Tsvishn shpil un parodye – fun 1865 biz 1918*. <http://zeltenebikher.blogspot.co.uk/2015/04/1865-1818.html>. On the Soviet 'Red Haggadah' see Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). Later poets, such as Perets Markish, also created a 'fusion of blasphemy and sacral form', 'overcoding' his poetry with imagery taken from liturgy, bible and Jewish history. Seth Wolitz, 'A Yiddish Modernist Dirge: Di Kupe of Perets Markish', *Modern Jewish Studies Annual* 6 (1987): 64.

<sup>17</sup> Leviticus 19:18.

deeply familiar form serves to suck the reader in, before turning the meaning around. It acts as fairly subtle manipulation.

Verse seven describes how the workers toil for seven days without being given the Sabbath off:

<i>Zibn teg arbaytn mir in gehinm-hatakhtn, shabes, undzer ru-tog, hobn mir oykh keyn tsayt vegn zikh tsu trakhtn. vayl shtendik iz shabes undzer mishpet, undzer yom-hadin, vos der sotn bay di veydzhes rekht oys undzere zind.</i>	Seven days we work in hell On <i>shabes</i> our day of rest, we have no time to reflect Because <i>shabes</i> is always our judgment, our day of judgment When Satan calculates our wages by our sins.
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Here, Sabbath as a day of rest is incorporated into the narrative of the text. The familiar situation tells of having to work on the Sabbath to make a living. Yet for the religious it is a sin to work on the Sabbath, a sin that may come out in extra wages, but wages paid by Satan. The text draws on superstition, on the fear of the punishment for good and evil. The layering of so many religious terms, concepts and quotations onto a socialist text creates a very strong impression. It is not simply that God is absent from this text, but that the notion of the divine is taken and inverted against religion, or shown as hypocritical. It is a brilliant example of how the poem undermines religion and at the same time expresses the inequality of capitalism. It makes the worker's *kine* utterly unlike an English socialist tract. The ideas are socialist, but so steeped in Jewish custom that they would not be comprehensible to an English socialist audience even in translation. The use of such detailed religious language and ideas transforms this standard socialist tract. They are totally *Jewish* texts, expressing mainstream, socialist critique of religion and capitalism, but specifically targeting the Jewish worker. As such, and notwithstanding the few specific references to England, the texts are transnational in that they would be understandable across the Jewish world.

These *kines* are not simple parodies. They are deeply serious, thoughtful and provocative attempts to subvert religious texts to socialist aims. Making the connection between an ancient form of religious text and the problems of the sweating system in London can be seen to re-engineer the religious text. The seriousness of the *kines* adds a gravitas to the socialist subject matter, equating suffering under capitalism with previous eras of persecution. However, as well as showing connections, subverting a

known text displays the differences and suggests, by example, ways to change and modernise.

The *kines* are clever, and there is something in the incongruity of overlaying a socialist and a religious text that sits on the edge of satire. It certainly shows the authors' familiarity with *Eykhe* and a knowledge of religious debates and it is this which adds an element of humour. *Eykhe* is traditionally said to be written by the prophet Jeremiah, however there was debate as to whether it was really the work of multiple authors. On the front cover of the workers' *kine* the authorship is attributed to Reuel, Yeser, Yisro, Khovav, Khever, Keini and Putiel. These seven names are pseudonyms, and are an in-joke. The third name on the list, Yisro, was the father-in-law of Moses, and in a commentary to the portion of the Torah called Yisro, the 11<sup>th</sup> Century commentator Rashi lists the seven names of Yisro. These are the same as those listed by the socialists on the front of their *kines*. There is no obvious connection between Yisro and *Eykhe*. Possibly the implied meaning is that the seven authors are really one person. Whatever the authors were implying in using the pseudonyms, these details are probably not as important as seeing how the Yiddish socialist writers, many of whom would have gone through rabbinical seminaries in Eastern Europe, were steeped in knowledge of Jewish texts and used that knowledge. They may have felt that it showed the immigrant orthodox that they were coming from the same culture as them, and that their political leanings came from thoughtful choice, not from ignorance. They may, indeed, have known more about religious literature than the traditionally religious Anglo-immigrant worker, and it is possible that some of the connotations would have gone over the heads of many workers.

In a similar vein, the poem '310', written by *Namerts* (Sayman Friman), uses a Talmudic idea to make specific points about capitalism. The 310 of the title refers to a section of the Talmud that describes the number of worlds that the righteous orthodox are promised after death as a reward for good behaviour on earth. Friman's poem is in the form of an argument between two characters: Capital and Work. Work claims that Capital has denied him the worlds of 'mills and breweries and pleasure gardens' and left him the one world of suffering, hunger and cold. Capital tells Work it does not matter because he will get 310 worlds eventually, which is more than one. Work charges Capital with constantly trying to find new worlds through missionaries colonising and looting other countries. Work warns Capital that it will rise out of the grave from the

multiple worlds and take over this one world on earth, leaving those 310 worlds of the afterlife to Capital.<sup>18</sup>

In this poem, the Talmudic idea provides a bargaining tool in the debate around capitalism. It reprimands the rich for abusing the worker, yet at the same time it berates the religious workers for seeing the future as spiritually secure so not needing to fight for the improvement of conditions in the present. It uses the concept of 310 to argue for political activism against capitalism. In so doing it belittles the religious concept and contends that the one modern non-religious world is more important than the 310 after death.

***Alt un yung: attacking belief in God.***

There are poems that are less sensitive to the feelings of religious workers, and directly claim that belief in God and religious practice are outmoded ideas that have no place in a modern society. The poem *Alt un yung* by Izak Likhtnshvayg puts religious thought at one end of a continuum and scientific discovery at the other end. In the poem's narrative, the old outmoded heavens were full of the mysteries of God, angels and paradise. It was a place where good and evil were rewarded. But now the modern heavens are open to the scientist who finds stars which make up other worlds where evil and righteousness have no part. The poem ends: 'In the heavens there is no mediator / It is entirely different above / And the elders must hear / Though they don't want to believe it.'<sup>19</sup>

The poem uses generational and scientific change as an argument for atheism. It allows for religion to be seen, not as foolish, but as old-fashioned and out-dated. Science becomes the new philosophy that progressive generations need to take on. Faith can no longer be blind, as science has afforded answers.

A poem that goes further with a clear statement of atheism is Bonfeld of Glasgow's 'Reb yudl far got' (Mr Jew Before God). The poem tells of a poor man in a corner of a synagogue endlessly praying, weeping and pleading with the creator of the bountiful and beautiful world not to forsake him. He begs for himself, and for the Jewish people,

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<sup>18</sup> Namerts (Sayman Friman), '310', *AF*, 15 May 1889.

<sup>19</sup> Izak Likhtnshvayg, 'Alt un yung', *AF*, 25 September 1896.

for relief from incessant anguish and poverty. The final line mockingly states: ‘And God answered thus – like the walls.’<sup>20</sup>

These two poems put across their message without using socialist jargon. They simplify. They tell stories. They use religious structures and terminology to show what they deem a modern perspective. The local referencing is minimal, ensuring their comprehension for a transnational audience.

***Akhdes: participating in local religious debate***

A poem, clearly not transnational in scope, was Morris Winchevsky’s ‘Akhdes’ (Unity), published in the *Arbayter fraynd*.<sup>21</sup> ‘Akhdes’ lampoons a range of positions in the Jewish religious spectrum in Britain including Anglo-Jewish and immigrant orthodox religious practice as well as the lack of homogeneity within the orthodox immigrant community. This poem can be seen to survey the religious Jewish landscape in England in 1890. Yet despite the local flavour, a re-worked and de-politicised adaptation of this song became popular across the Yiddish world.<sup>22</sup>

‘Akhdes’ is lighthearted and published in a satirical column in the *Arbayter fraynd*. However, a poem entitled ‘Unity’, written by the grandfather of Jewish socialism in 1890 when fierce socialist discussion was taking place, cannot be taken at face value. One of the concepts that most angered socialists, and, indeed, those who became *Bundists* a few years later, was the notion of *klal yisroel*, that Jews are united because they are Jews. The socialists did not see any unity that cut across class because Jewish workers had more in common with non-Jewish workers. Winchevsky, in this satire, attacks the phony unity of religion, and promotes the authentic unity of the proletariat, of workers of the world uniting.

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<sup>20</sup> Bonfeld, ‘Reb yudl far got’, *AF*, 24 July 1896.

<sup>21</sup> Winchevsky, ‘Akhdes’, *AF*, 29 August 1890.

<sup>22</sup> Between the World Wars ‘Akhdes’ became the basis of the popular song ‘Ale Brider’. The sung version reversed Winchevsky’s original meaning by creating a community cohesion song about unity. It cut out all allusions to local politics and religion. Mlotek calls Ale Brider a ‘folklorised version’, quoting Litvin in *Di tsayt* (n.d.) that the song ‘was the most popular folk song that was sung in the old country mostly at Bundist parties,’ Mlotek, *Mir Trogn a Gezang!: The New Book of Yiddish Songs*, 160–1. This song remains popular to this day, made famous by the Klezmatiks. Their version added verses about women and homosexuality, nodding to equality politics, however losing the irony, the historical politics and Winchevsky’s socialist message. *Ale Brider*, performed by the Klezmatiks, from Shvaygn=Toyt (Round Rock: Piranha Records, 1989), CD.

As with other Winchevsky poems, he contributes to current debate in an incisive and, in this instance, a humorous way. Winchevsky moves between broad statements about Jewish religious practice and the socialist position on workers' unity to the specificity of England and the peculiarities of debates happening within Anglo-Jewry. This is no simple satire, but a carefully composed intervention into important debates about unity.

The poem is in three sections. The first section starts with the assertion that everyone is united:

*Yo mir zaynen ale eynik!  
tsu mir hobn fil tsu veynik,  
un mir zaynen ale brider,  
un mir davnen fun eyn sider.*

Yes we are all united!  
Whether we have a lot or a little,  
And we are all brothers,  
And we pray from one prayer book.

These first lines set the tone for what is to follow, oblique satire where the meaning is opposite to what is written. The first two lines claim that Jewish unity is based on religion, not class, and this indicates how this poem will turn ideas on their head. The next unity to be attacked is in lines three and four. The line 'Praying from one prayer book' was not simply a version of the colloquial expression 'singing from the same hymn sheet'. 'Akhdes' was published a mere four weeks after the publication of the Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire translated by Rabbi Simeon Singer. This was a long-awaited publication which was an attempt to be inclusive in two ways. Firstly it included all important prayers, both daily and Sabbath prayers and a range of prayers for specific occasions usefully collected in one book. Secondly it was a new English translation that was attempting to be understandable by everyone, that is all English speakers:

The translation is accurate without being pedantic, while the language graceful and melodious though it be, is equally simple and prayerful. Mr Singer has gone to the age of Milton and of the Authorised Version of the Bible for inspiration: and the result is that the new edition of our prayer-book presents a pure and idiomatic rendering in place of the high-flown extravagances that disfigure so many of the earlier edition... [of] more than a century ago.<sup>23</sup>

This attempt to produce a unified prayer book across the Anglo-Jewish communities was, indeed, scholarly, useful and beautiful, however it was not a prayer book for the whole Jewish community. It was for the Anglo-Jews, translated into *English*, and deliberately designed to look like the Christian Book of Common Prayer. It was an

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<sup>23</sup> 'The Authorised Daily Prayer Book' *JC*, 1 August 1890, 7.

English prayer book because ‘whether the insides were Jewish or Christian, that was what an Englishman’s prayer book looked like in 1890.’<sup>24</sup> The attempt at unity in the prayer book was one of selective unity which did not include the religious culture of the Yiddish-speaking East End *khevres*.<sup>25</sup>

The second section of the poem lists the differences between religious Jews living in England, both within East End orthodoxy and between East End orthodox and Anglo-Jewish. The repeated claim the poem makes, with obvious satire, was that these differences are irrelevant because everyone is a Jew.

*Kurtse peyes, lange peyes,  
yidn mit un on matbeyes...  
frume kep un kep fun zinders,  
kep in yarmulkes, tsilinders,  
ale zaynen nor eyn folk...*

Short sidelocks, long sidelocks,  
Jews with and without money...  
Religious heads and heads of sinners,  
Heads in skullcaps, top-hats,  
But everyone is one people...

The different length of sidelocks refers to different types of immigrant orthodox sects. Sidelocks were worn by both *hasidim* and *misnagdim*, yet philosophies and styles of prayer were different between the two groups and also between sects within the groups. *shtiblekh* and *khevres* were often bitterly divided by what sect they were a part of, and the different customs and attendant fashion. One could see by the style of clothing and sidelocks which sect an orthodox man belonged to. Yet, because the orthodox were generally immigrant workers, Winchevsky reiterates the inversion of the socialist dogma like a running gag. Unity exists across class, that there is unity between rich and poor because everyone is a Jew.

The poem continues by alluding to antagonism between Anglo-Jewry and immigrant orthodoxy. With short phrases and amusing rhymes the poem puts across the absurdity of the suggestion that we are all equal. The word *zinder* (sinner) is rhymed with *tsilinder* (top hat). The obvious gag here is that the skullcaps are on the religious heads of the poor Jews without money, and the top hats are worn by the moneyed and sinning Anglo-Jews. The humour is at the expense of any nuance, because the broad categories of good and bad, rich and poor, immigrant and Anglo-Jewish are easy jibes.

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<sup>24</sup> Elkan Levy, ‘The New West End Synagogue, 1879-2004’ (Lecture, July 11, 2004), [www.newwestend.org.uk/visitors/history-and-architecture.html](http://www.newwestend.org.uk/visitors/history-and-architecture.html).

<sup>25</sup> Even to Anglo-Jewry, the Singer’s Prayer Book was a compromise, with different elements of the community considering it too moderate or too traditional. Clark, *Albion and Jerusalem*, 180.



The final section of the poem returns to addressing solely the immigrant community, with the line *Frum un link, fareynikt ale* (Religious and left, all are united). Then follows nine lines of inseparable unions. Some of these are:

<i>Vi der khosn mit der kale...</i>	Like the bride and groom...
<i>vi der bezem mitn shtekn,</i>	Like the broom and stick,
<i>vi di tsitses mit di ekn</i>	Like the [men's ritual] fringes with tassles
<i>vi di tir mit der mezuze...</i>	Like the door with the mezuzah
<i>vi der khumesh mit der rashe</i>	Like the bible with Rashi (commentary)

Amid the religious items of *tsitsit* and *mezuze* and the bible, there is a dig at the conflict on the left alluded to by the broom representing anarchism. This poem was published during the time when divisions between socialists and anarchists were becoming more intense, and there was constant angry debate in meetings and in the socialist Yiddish press. It was only six months later that the socialists felt compelled to leave the *Arbayter fraynd* as it turned anarchist and give up the Berner Street club.

The unity of the poem's title is about what we would understand as ethnicity, being Jews. However, the socialist debate around false consciousness was not the only debate being alluded to here. The subject of unity was also being debated in the Anglo-Jewish community. Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler had died six months earlier, leading to discussion about unity in the pages of the *Jewish Chronicle*. In February 1890 two letters were printed in the *Jewish Chronicle* under the title 'Unity, Not Uniformity'. Both letters argued that Adler's death was a turning point, creating an opportunity to overtly address disagreements within the Anglo-Jewish community concerning synagogue practice.<sup>26</sup> Responses argued variously: that the debate must include the Federation of Synagogues for the sake of 'communal unity'; that the incoming Chief Rabbi should 'steer a middle course between the extremes'; that Reform should be included; that there should be a united Jewish divorce procedure, and whether the Chief Rabbi should live in the East End.<sup>27</sup> 'Unity' was high on the topical agenda, and Winchevsky's poem of the same title, 'Akhdes', sat in the midst of this topical discussion.

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<sup>26</sup> 'Unity, not Uniformity', *JC*, 7 February 1890, 6.

<sup>27</sup> *JC*, 7 February 1890, 11–12; 9 May 1890, 13; 27 June 1890, 15–16, 25 July 1890, 19–20.

The first line of 'Akhdes' begins with the word *Yo* (yes). Starting with the word 'yes' implies that there was a question to which this is an answer. However, whether there was a specific question or not, Winchevsky's poetic response was his contribution to the debate. The central idea opined that rather than unity there was antagonism between rich and poor Jews, Yiddish-speaking orthodox and Anglo-Jews, Yiddish-speaking orthodox and socialist Jews, socialist and Anglo-Jews, and between factions within orthodox Yiddish-speaking Jews. It even hinted at fractures in the left.

Although Winchevsky may have used the word *akhdes* to highlight the discussion on unity in Anglo-Jewry, the poem is mostly lampooning the debate by asserting that Anglo-Jewish forms of unity are fictive forms of unity. The only objective unity is that of the working class, their relation to the means of production, against the false unity of religion and subgroups within religion. Through his jesting on religious differences Winchevsky points out the socialist dogma of religion as a false consciousness, where any semblance of unity hides the inexorable antagonism between capital and labour. The poem was written for a socialist audience, who would no doubt have giggled at the creativity of their celebrity activist producing a satire with a lightness of touch, and a fearless lack of deference.

### **Music-Hall Songs: immigrants losing faith**

The socialists used poetry to show that religion had had its day. Yet many workers were losing their religious faith for less ideological reasons. The *Jewish Chronicle* of 1903 reported a paper given by East End social worker and commentator Harry Samuel Lewis to a meeting of the West London Synagogue Association. Lewis aired anxiety about the 'decay of orthodoxy in East London':

It is a common saying amongst the foreign Jews that England is a "freie Medinah" [free country] – a country where the restrictions of orthodoxy cease to apply... As the Jew becomes anglicised, there is a risk that he may be de-Judaised. Unless he possess a reserve force of earnest conviction, he will be unable to retain a religious life which differs widely from that of the world around him.<sup>28</sup>

This strongly worded paper, addressed to the Anglo-Jewish orthodox, cited the amount of voluntary Sabbath-breaking and the decline in regular synagogue attendance. Immigrant men may have come to London with their prayer shawls and phylacteries,

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<sup>28</sup> H. S. Lewis. 'East End Judaism – Need and Possibilities of Reform'. *JC*, 20 February 1903. Lewis was a social worker dealing with family and youth issues in the East End. He co-authored Russell and Lewis, *The Jew in London*. He was particularly interested in loss of faith.

but after a few months, when they had ceased being ‘greeners’, the religious implements were discarded along with the practice. Lewis’s fear was that losing the religious code would lead to more extensive moral degradation.

The decline of religion was the theme of six Anglo-Yiddish music hall songs, though they did not always pursue the subject with the same serious intensity and dismay with which Lewis wrote. The Yiddish theatre and music halls were often at loggerheads with the orthodox immigrants because they were Sabbath-breakers performing on Friday nights and Saturdays, and sang songs that contravened orthodox Jewish codes of morality. However, the music halls were not only patronised by non-religious Jews. The spectrum of observance meant that many Jews would be ‘partially’ observant. There were also Jewish men and women who, whether practising Judaism or not, may have been attached to the religious mores or had feelings of loss of the prescribed religious code they had been a part of in Eastern Europe. Some of the characters of music-hall songs put across those feelings of confusion about how orthodox practice had been abandoned in England. The Yiddish music hall provided a place to vent emotions, a place where expressions of raucous laughter or catcalls or weeping were seen as an intrinsic part of the experience. In the Yiddish music hall feelings of loss or guilt could be acknowledged in the company of others who were fellow defiers of the religious code. Both the sadness at losing something precious on account of immigration and the satire directed at religious ideas and authority could be expressed in songs in both a serious and comic way.

Joseph Markovitsh’s sentimental songs offered empathetic narratives of people complaining about the way religion had been discarded in London. In ‘Aheym Tsurik’ (Back home), the singer bemoans his decision to sell up and leave the old country after his wife died, and move to live with his daughter and son-in-law in London.<sup>29</sup> He describes his despondency after his first few weeks in London:

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<sup>29</sup> Markovitsh, ‘Aheym Tsurik’. The title implies going/moving back home.

*Nishto keyn yontev, keyn shabes, keyn din  
ven ikh zing kol mekadesh klapt oybn di  
mashin.*

*Men arbet im shabes, men neyt un men prest  
men kokht do oykh shabes, men bakt un men  
frest.*

*Dos yidishkayt iz do tsu shand un tsu shpot  
men lakht do fun frume, men gloybt nisht in  
got.*

*Mayn eydem, der knaker, der makher, der  
bos  
roykhert im shabes a papiros.*

Here there are no festivals, no Sabbath, no law  
If I sing 'Kol Mekadesh', the machine is heard  
upstairs.

They work on the Sabbath, sew and press  
They also cook here on the Sabbath, bake and  
gobble.

Here Judaism is held up to shame and ridicule.  
Here people laugh at the orthodox, and don't  
believe in God.

My son-in-law, the big shot, the boss  
Smokes a cigarette on the Sabbath.

*Kol mekadesh* is a prayer traditionally sung by the man of the house on a Friday night after coming in from synagogue, surrounded by the family just before the Sabbath meal. In 'Aheym Tsurik' the sound of the *Kol Mekadesh* prayer is heard in counterpoint to sounds not allowed on the Sabbath, those of the tailoring machines and cooking pots. Instead of sitting as a family to the Sabbath meal, people gobble like animals. It is not simply the act of breaking the religious rules of the Sabbath that the father complains about, it is the complete lack of interest in religious practice. In the same article quoted above, Lewis warned against this indifference:

It must often happen, however, that former convictions are replaced with indifference – indifference that not only extends to positive religion in the narrower sense but also to the obligations of moral rectitude.<sup>30</sup>

And, indeed, in the third verse there is a lodger jibe, showing extra-marital sex as a symptom of the slippery slope that Sabbath-breaking comes to. The tone of 'Aheym Tsurik' is light as it caricatures the family's loss of religion. The more serious ridicule is saved for the father, not for his orthodox practice, but for his anti-modernisation stance in eschewing freedom and democracy. The chorus runs:

*Aheym, aheym, aheym tsurik  
moykhl, moykhl aykh dos glik  
oyf hefker iz dos altsding do geshtelt  
Ikh bin mir a yid fun altn shtand  
moykhl aykh dos fraye land  
aheym aheym tsurik in der alter velt.*

Home, home, back home  
You can keep your joy  
Everything here is chaotic.  
I am a Jew of the old ways  
You can keep your free country  
Home, back home to the old world.

This song polarises the loss of religion into east and west, the old and the new, father and daughter. Although the verses show some sympathy for the father's dismay at the

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<sup>30</sup> Lewis, 'East End Judaism'.

loss of religion, his rejection of the modernity of England transforms the father into a figure of fun and he is no longer treated seriously.

This cannot be said for ‘Di tsvey doyres’ (The Two Generations), another song by Markovitsh on the same theme. ‘Di tsvey doyres’ also engages with generational difference and the anglicisation of religious practice.<sup>31</sup> However, this song does not have a humorous music-hall style, but treats the subject seriously and with anger. It describes the way people with modern ideas forsake and scorn the old belief:

<i>Fun altn dor lakht zikh der yunger oykh...</i>	The young also laugh at the old generation...
<i>alts vos alt iz hot bay zey keyn kheyne...</i>	Everything that is ‘old’ has no charm for them...
<i>zey hobn shoyfn far zey gants andere toyres</i>	They have completely different codes of law,
<i>andere klayzlekh, vi far zeyer tsayt</i>	Other prayer rooms, up to date
<i>men hast un men shpast</i>	They hate and they jest
<i>un men lakht un men makht</i>	And they laugh and they make
<i>fun dos yidishkayt an okh un vey</i>	A travesty out of orthodox Judaism,
<i>fun got, fun gebot</i>	Of God, of the commandments
<i>fun gantsn religyon</i>	Of the whole religion
<i>alts iz a narishkayt bay zey.</i>	Everything is foolishness to them.

Markovitsh’s narrator can only see the world in religious terms, revealed in his language. For him the youth may reject the actual *toyre* (law) and *kloyzlekh* (prayer rooms), but they cannot be discarded as concepts because they are the structures of his world. They can be re-thought and re-created into something new, even if that newness is totally contrary to the meaning of the religious terms. The last lines of the song mount a final attack: *Men khokhemt zikh un nokh di ale derokhim / shtarbn shtarbt men dokh a nar*, that after all the fooling about trying different ways in life, they (the youth) will die as fools. English mores are shown as foolish, but sympathy is unlikely to stay entirely with the song’s narrator from a music hall full of those young being berated.

Although the youth may be the people losing their faith, the real culprit in these songs is repeatedly seen as England. The strong structures of Eastern European orthodoxy do not hold sway in England, and the lure of English culture is too strong. The song ‘Freg kayn katshanes!’ (Don’t ask stupid questions!) suggests that the most foolish idea is the suggestion that you could come from Galicia as a religious Jew and remain so in England.<sup>32</sup> The title is a word play. *Katshanes* is not a common Yiddish word. It is defined as a stalk or an ear of corn, but is used in slang to mean ‘blockhead, moron; bad

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<sup>31</sup> Markovitsh, ‘Di tsvey doyres’, *LLM*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Nager. ‘Freg kayn katshanes’, *LLM*, 9–10.

actor/singer, ham.’<sup>33</sup> The title mimics the expression *freg nit kayn kashes*. Although the word *kashe* means a difficult question or Talmudic problem for which there is no easy answer, the expression *freg nit kayn kashes* is slang for ‘don’t ask silly questions.’<sup>34</sup> The title, sung repeatedly in the chorus, plays with the similarity of the two words. On one hand it can be seen to be poking fun at a religious concept by making a difficult question on a piece of Talmudic law a ‘cabbage stalk’, a foolish question. But it also implies that there is no answer to the question, or at least not a known or obvious one. The question posed in the song ‘Freg kayn Katshanes!’ asks whether it is possible for a religious immigrant to stay religious in London. The answer posed in the first verse claims that:

<i>A kosherer yid, a tsadik iz do gor kayn metsiye</i>	A religious Jew, a pious man has no value here
...	...
<i>Yidishkayt, khsidishkayt hot do gor kayn kiyum</i>	Judaism, <i>hasidism</i> does not exist here

The use of the word *do* (here) lays the blame of secularisation at the feet of emigration to the free world. The chorus runs:

<i>Freg nit kayn katshanes, es iz england</i>	Don’t ask silly questions, this is England
<i>vos toyg mir di tanes, es iz england</i>	What’s the use of complaining, this is England
<i>ales iz kapoyer do geshtelt...</i>	Everything here is set up contrary.
<i>A medinele mit minhogimlekh</i>	A little country with little customs <sup>35</sup>

England is shown as no place for the orthodox immigrant. England with its unfamiliar modes of behaviour transforms Judaism into Anglo-Judaism. It is this anglicisation of the religion by the Anglo-Jewish community that the orthodox immigrant finds so strange:

<i>Shuln makht men do lehavdl poshet gor</i>	People make synagogues here, as if you could
<i>fun kloysters</i>	make such a comparison, like churches.
<i>peysekhit men op getray</i>	They keep Passover loyally
<i>teykef nokh dem seyder geyt men esn</i>	Immediately after the <i>seder</i> has finished, they
<i>oysters</i>	eat oysters
<i>anshtot afikoymen est men gor pay.</i>	Instead of the ritual matzah they just eat pie.
<i>Yomkipper zey haltn in eyn rukn un fresn</i>	On Yom Kippur they continuously push and
<i>oy vay.</i>	gobble, oh no.

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<sup>33</sup> Beinfeld and Bochner, *Yiddish Dictionary*, 592. The spelling in the dictionary would be *katshenes*. The long ‘a’ used in the song as *katshanes* makes it rhyme with *tanes*.

<sup>34</sup> The four questions on Passover are termed *Di fir kashes*.

<sup>35</sup> It is hard to translate diminutives in Yiddish. Diminutives do not necessarily mean ‘little’. In this instance it may mean strange or different. It could be affectionate or mocking.

The Anglo-Jews are framed in a Christian world which has churches and oysters and pie. The English foods are used to show the incongruity of Englishness and Jewishness. Oysters are not kosher at any time and pie is not kosher on Passover. On Yom Kippur, when Jews should be fasting, they are gobbling like animals. Using these food items in the narrative of this song suggests that it is not simply that Anglo-Jews have lapsed from religious practice. Worse, they have re-invented Jewish religious practice to make it English and resembling Christian practice. Rather than omitting to participate in Torah law, it is making a statement of deliberate choice of not keeping Jewish law and flagrantly displaying it.

The music hall may exaggerate for comic effect, though the Anglo-Jewish orthodox may not have found it so funny. The lyrics of these three London songs can be seen as continuing a debate, airing prevalent ideas, pushing an agenda and creating a space for people to engage with these ideas through entertainment. Yet the focus on England with its freedom to oust religion ignores the growing secularisation not only occurring in the Western world, but also in Eastern Europe. The song ‘Di velt is meshuge’ (The World is Mad) suggests that ‘what this dismal London has done’ is a part of a world phenomenon:

*Mit yorn tsurik gedenk ikh gut  
frum iz geven di gantse velt...  
Haynt farkert...  
A yid gor on a bord  
eyn hultay  
a shkots...  
un ikh vel shrayen gevult  
az di velt iz meshuge*

Years ago, I remember well  
All the world was religious...  
Today's it's the opposite...  
A Jew without any beard  
A libertine  
A prankster...  
And I will shout help  
Because the world is mad<sup>36</sup>

So London becomes a part of modernisation that is epitomised in the final verse by a clever German invention of a new machine: *Un mit an umbreler flien zey mitakhes lemale biz unter di shtern*, where people can fly to the stars.<sup>37</sup> The implication is that new developments in technology run alongside the decline of religious practice. Instead of looking for God in the heavens, people are now flying from place to place and looking for stars.

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Di velt iz meshuge’, SY. The word *git* rhymes in the song with *yid*.

<sup>37</sup> This probably refers to the Zeppelin airship, developed by the German Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin in the early twentieth century.

The idea that the modern world is moving fast and leaving a bewildering impact on the immigrant to London is the theme of Sam Levenvirt's 'London hot zikh ibergekert' (London has turned everything upside down).<sup>38</sup> This song does not detail the loss of religion, but gives a sense that the absence of religion in London is a natural and desired part of modernisation. In the song, London is a deeply strange place where people eat fish with *potatoes*, trains run *underground*, women wear *trousers*, Jews speak *English* and immigrants have *telephones*. These aspects of the enlightened world serve to show how the old religion has had its day.

If religion is being questioned, then so is God. 'Ikh bin a yidl fun der lite' (I am a Jew from Lithuania) by Markovitsh tells the familiar story of an immigrant to London escaping pogroms and economic hardship, only to find greater misfortune in London. Starving, the narrator pleads to God for help:

<p><i>Derfar shtel ikh zikh davnen mit a groys fayer reboyne shel oylem tate getrayer a kashe tsu dir hob ikh a vayle nokh vos darfst du mikh mutshn az lebn lozt di mikh memale? Entfert rashe a teyrets got freg nisht ka shayles got ka kashes zolt ir nit fregn. Varum ka entfert vet er nisht gebn er zitst zikh oybn on shvaygt zikh shtil un do mit yeder vos er vil eyner bos tsveytn tsapt dos blut un er shvaygt un es art es gut nu freg ikh aykh tsu iz dos rekht?</i></p>	<p>So I stand and pray with great fire God of the world, loyal father I have a tough question for you Why do you need to torture me when life itself does? Rashi gives a response, God asks no questions. You shouldn't ask God difficult questions Because he won't give you an answer He sits in heavens and is silent And here everyone does whatever he likes One boss sheds another's blood And he stays silent and doesn't care So I ask you, is that just?<sup>39</sup></p>
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Markovitsh locates God in the heavens, but the heavens above England are closed to entreaty. God remains silent. The England of the music halls has become a place of no religion and no God. No God to stop you eating oysters on Passover or having an affair with the lodger, but also no God to assuage the hunger of poverty.

These six music-hall songs portray the tension between religious and non-religious Jews. They show immigrants trying to create a new way of being, trying to define what it means to be a non-religious Jew in England. The songs portray characters who are secular as a positive choice. They celebrate being modern, new, up-to-date, English,

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<sup>38</sup> Levenvirt Brothers. 'London hot zikh ibergekert'.

<sup>39</sup> Markovitsh, 'Ikh bin a yidl fun der lite', *LK*, 106.



young, not old-fashioned. They can be seen to alleviate the fear of being an infidel by normalising secularity as modernity. The songs are not generally judgmental. They tell stories, and often lampoon *all* the characters. They portray London as a tempting experience, a place of change, encouraging a move away from the Eastern European religious past. In effect, the repetition of similar songs, poking fun at similar targets raises the profile of being non-religious and re-enforces cultural rather than religious Judaism as a lifestyle choice. In this way, some of these songs exemplify the denigration of religion that Lewis feared. It could be argued that the songs are a symptom of that decay. They encourage and normalise a particular type of anglicisation that suggests that religion is not so important or necessary in England. Hearing these songs in the music-hall environment may have offered audiences comfort and solidarity at being in a community of people losing their faith. As entertainment, they may have provided an outlet for audiences to laugh, possibly as part of a cathartic experience. The songs can be seen as part of establishing a new status quo celebrating a non-religious anglicised cultural reality.

### **Satire from Mainstream Religious Writers**

Poetry written by mainstream religious Jewish poets is different in content, atmosphere and tone from the material already explored in this chapter. It does not contain the same tension between orthodoxy and lack of orthodoxy. It does not wave a political flag, bemoan a lost religious world or celebrate loss of faith. These satirists wrote for a mixed audience of East End immigrants, mostly traditionally religious rather than orthodox. Some of the poetry is critical of religious behaviour, but these interventions come from the inside, by writers involved in that religious practice, rather than by socialist or non-religious outsiders. These poets often mock the anglicised religion offered by the established Anglo-Jewish community, however they seem to want to create a modern, up-to-date, religious future in England. They want to improve and modernise their religious life, not lose it.

The poetry described in this section was mostly published in the *Idisher ekspres*, the *Tsayt* and the *Blofer*.<sup>40</sup> The *Idisher ekspres* came from an orthodox or traditionally religious perspective. The articles and news stories from England and around the

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<sup>40</sup> Two poems were published in periodicals; the one-off *Purim zhurnal* of 1910 and the popular weekly magazine the *Fonograf*.

Yiddish world take orthodoxy and Yiddish religious culture for granted as the norm. As well as the daily fare of current affairs, politics and strike action, it reported news from synagogues and *Talmetyres*, updates on the *shechita* debate and other religious controversies and advertised religious artefacts and kosher foods. The *Tsayt* was a mainstream Jewish daily paper covering news from England and abroad of Jewish interest. It aimed at a wide inclusive audience, including many religious readers. The *Blofer* was a fortnightly satirical magazine with strong links to the Yiddish theatre, creating much of its humour at the expense of actors, writers and critics. It was broadly secular, but assumed its audience had a basic level of religious participation or at least knowledge of religious Jewish culture. The *Blofer* satirised all positions: religious and non-religious, Anglo-Jewish, immigrant orthodox, permissive and radical ideologies. The writer Avrom Margolin (Avreml) edited the *Blofer* and wrote satirical poetry regularly for all three papers. He wrote over half of the poetry considered in this section. Other writers wrote under pseudonyms or were not named.

Many of the poems in this section were published to coincide with particular festivals. The festivals are full of rich pickings for the writer who could use their central ideas, historical stories, ritual and liturgy, relating them to current events and community foibles. Sometimes the link to the festival is tenuous, but the structure is used to make political points or to create humour through the rich subtext it created. The festivals are very different in character, so satirical social comment could be focused as appropriate. It could take on the tone of the festival, or could subvert it both for humour and for greater emphasis.

### ***A pekel neviyes: Avreml's naming and shaming***

Avreml regularly used liturgy from festivals and biblical sources as intellectual ammunition. His satire pokes fun at known personalities in the London Jewish community. The poem 'A pekel neviyes' (A Bundle of Prophecies) is based on part of a text read in synagogue during the festival of *Sukes* (Tabernacles).<sup>41</sup> The passage from Ezekiel describes the end of time where there would be a huge war to end all wars.<sup>42</sup> Ezekiel prophesies the violent and bloody horrors that will happen as the world is turned upside down. The passage starts and ends with the Hebrew phrase *Vehaya bayom hahu* (And it will happen on that day). 'A pekel neviyes' uses the same opening and

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<sup>41</sup> Avreml, 'A pekel neviyes', *Blofer*, Vol 3, November 1911, 5-6.

<sup>42</sup> Ezekiel 38:18-39:9.

closing words with Yiddish translation, before explaining that, on the day the Messiah comes, it will be the East End and Whitechapel that will be turned upside down. One 66-line stanza describes the havoc that will be caused in the London Jewish community.

Avreml conjures a mixture of eighteen famous or local personalities who were household names in the Jewish East End, and prophesies what will happen to them on that day. There is the Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler, founder of Liberal Judaism Claude Montefiore, and choirmaster and composer at the Great Synagogue in Duke's Place Shmuel Alman. There are Zionist leaders Theodore Herzl and Ahad Ha'am and scholar Yankev-Meyer Zalkind.<sup>43</sup> There is the Yiddish playwright Yankev (Jacob) Gordin, actors Yankev Blaykhman and Max Brin, orchestra conductor at the Pavilion Theatre Ferdinand Shtoyb and music-hall artists Joseph Markovitsh and Arn Nager. Also included are the missionary Tzvi Gutman, the anarchist leader Rudolf Rocker, theatre critic and journalist Moris Mayer, Shteynvolf who ran a Jewish restaurant, the 'red rabbi' of the Kovne *khevre* and Winston Churchill.<sup>44</sup>

As impressive as the list of people, was the prophecy of the role they would play on the day of judgment. The Chief Rabbi would stand down and questions and rulings would be taken to Ahad Ha'am. Zalkind and his teachers would become editors of the Anglo-Jewish newspaper, the *Jewish World*. Rocker would become a *kashres* (Kosher food) inspector of the meat market. Shmuel Alman (the Classical composer and conductor) would take lessons from Shtoyb (the popular Yiddish composer and conductor). Also the main Yiddish papers, the *Idisher ekspres* and the *Idisher zhurnal* would stop publishing in Yiddish and be of interest to the English people 'they persecute endlessly.' The new editor of these papers would be Churchill and the president would be Mayer. Shteynvolf would become a deputy in the House of Lords, and all would be stage-managed by Montefiore.

The poem is full of in-jokes, lampooning the gap between the Anglo-Jews and the immigrants, religious and secular, high and low art, different political positions, scholarship and journalism. The poem covers theatre squabbles at the Wonderland Yiddish music hall and arguments about the quality of journalism and 'yellow papers'. It mentions British colonial politics and possible Zionist colonies in Africa and America.

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<sup>43</sup> Zalkind tried to reconcile religion with anarchism and Zionism.

<sup>44</sup> In the poem, they are referred to by their surnames only.

The humour is fast and furious, rather like stand-up comedy. It is typical of the style Avreml uses when he writes for the *Blofer*. He is not careful, not deferential and names people indiscriminately. ‘A pekel neviyes’ is a parade of personalities putting religious, Zionist, anarchist, popular and English on a par.

As with the socialist material discussed earlier, the poem uses a cleverly crafted religious framework subverted for another purpose. There is a huge gap between the grave tone of Ezekiel’s prophecy and Avreml’s parody. The religious text does not add gravitas to Avreml’s argument, rather it ridicules both Jewish London and the prophetic text. The subversion of Ezekiel’s prophesy of global disaster to Whitechapel questions the importance that locals put on local controversies, and suggests that Whitechapel does not have to wait until the Messianic end of time because it is already an upside-down place full of conflicting ideologies and opinions. The final words *Vehaya bayom hahu* (And it will happen on that day) are deliberately mistranslated in the Yiddish as ‘*Good* will happen on that day.’ This gag ironically suggests that turning the East End world upside down might be a good thing. Any critique here is too broad to be cutting, and is generally in good humour.

A stronger critique of religion is implied in the poem ‘*Al kheytn motivn*’, written to coincide with Yom Kippur. Here Avreml uses ‘types’ as stooges for his humour: reverends (Anglo-Jewish rabbinate), Yiddish comedians, radicals, businessmen, preachers and politicians.<sup>45</sup> *Al kheytn* is the name of a prayer read repeatedly in synagogue during the long fast day. It is a personal prayer which lists the sins that one is atoning for in requesting forgiveness from God. The Hebrew prayer begins each line with ‘For the sin that I have committed’ followed by the sins. The sins are general and broad. Avreml begins his poem with a cheeky opening gambit:

<i>Ikh vil bay dir, got, nit oyf ale ‘al kheytn’ oyf zind, vos ikh keynmol, bin gor nit bagangen...</i>	I don’t want, God, to atone for any sins For sins that I have never committed...
<i>Zol beser der rikhtiker nur ‘bal-aveyre’ andekn zayn ‘kheytn’...</i>	Better the right sinner Uncover their sin
<i>anshtot dayn unshuldign, oremen poetl</i>	Instead of your poor, innocent little poet.

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<sup>45</sup> Avreml, ‘*Al kheytn motivn*’, *Tsayt*, 10 October 1913. Similar use of ‘types’ was seen in ‘*Di simkhes toyre trinker*’ (chapter 3).

The rest of the poem uses the language of the *Al kheyts* prayer to tell each group of people which sins they should be atoning for. The poem, although humorous, contains sharp condemnation from an untouchable, guilt-free poet, who is, in effect, accusing them of the sin he proposes. The critique of religion is twofold. On one level the poet decries the generalisation of the sins. People atoning for sins they have not done serves to hide those that they have. On another level the poem chooses to comment on the structures of Anglo-Jewry and on the quality of the rabbinate.

In one verse reverends are attacked as ‘preaching for money’, arguing that Anglo-Jewish ministers do their job only to earn a living rather than from conviction.<sup>46</sup> On Yom Kippur, the day that reverends are acting as intermediaries between their communities and God, praying for atonement for collective sins, they are personally accused of *shkhad* and *bitui sfosoyim* (bribery and vain or pointless speech). In another stanza, Yiddish music-hall comedians are ordered to say the *al kheyts* for *nibl pe* and *veytser-hore* (speaking about sex or using sexual swear words and giving in to the evil inclination). The term *nibl pe* is not in the *Al kheyts* prayer. The prayer does include similar terms, such as *dibur pe* (offensive speech) and *tipshus pe* (foolish talk) but seemingly neither of these *al kheyts* were strong enough for what Avreml wanted to say about the music-hall performers’ sexual banter and songs with sexual lyrics. The term *veytser-hore* refers to bodily sins such as gluttony. In this instance it is probably referring to sexually permissive behaviour. In a verse berating the socialists and anarchists, they are accused of not simply ignoring Yom Kippur, but deliberately eating on the day. The sin Avreml ironically accuses the socialists and anarchists of is sinning *bivli doas* (unintentionally). The radicals could not plead ignorance of orthodox ideas and practice. Their incitement of the orthodox included the provocative annual Yom Kippur balls, which they would have been in the process of preparing while the synagogue goers were beating their breasts to the *al kheyts*.

The poem ‘*Al kheyts motivn*’ uses part of familiar liturgy. Jews who rarely went to synagogue would have attended on Yom Kippur. So Avreml could be sure that his liturgical references to *Al kheyts* would be more familiar than the more esoteric Talmudic or prophetic references used in other poems. What would also be known is the solemnity and importance of the *Al kheyts* prayer, not generally a topic for humour.

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<sup>46</sup> This is rather unlikely as it was a source of controversy that Anglo-Jewish ministers were badly paid.

However, Avreml does not hold his punches. He is offensive, direct, and implying that certain people are sinning and getting away with it. They may not be breaking the law of the land, so, by intoning religious morality, Avreml's accusation is more internal fare.

The offensiveness of Avreml's insults are moderated by the constant targeting of the same types and individuals, which create a running gag. The cumulative nature serves to reinforce and emphasise Avreml's opinions, but it also seems to reduce the power of the criticism. The volume of poetry with similar messages builds up into a consistent, but not very deep, argument about the difference, dissonance and immorality in the Jewish community. The effect of repeatedly using religious imagery for local politics has an additional effect. Avreml is critiquing religion by applying religious structures to daily life. This can be seen as a form of anglicisation where modernity is enmeshed in the fabric of religious ideas. By doing so Avreml is not arguing that religion is outdated as a concept, but that religious ideas and practice need rethinking and reinterpreting.

If one part of the religious debate demands modernisation of an old religion, the other end of the spectrum sees Jews making religion out of secularity. The re-appropriation of religious structures is the theme of the poem 'Moyshe un yakhne'.<sup>47</sup> The poem sets up a dichotomy between the low-brow popular culture and religion. The names Moyshe and Yakhne are theatre slang. They are playful yet derogatory terms for uncouth fans who love the spectacle, their idols, cheap laughs and music-hall gags. The poem begins with the suggestion that the *moyshes* and *yakhnes* set the tone for the Jewish East End: 'from the Pavilion to the *Makhzike hadas*' [synagogue]. The *Makhzike hadas*, amongst the most orthodox of the East End immigrant synagogues, is mocked simply by the association with *moyshes* and *yakhnes*. The poem continues to explain that everyone 'dances like monkeys' to get the attention of the *moyshes* and *yakhnes*. The 'yellow press, anarchists, artists and rabbis' attempt to raise their basic literary, artistic and moral standards. The charity boards and rabbis worry about them, the missionaries want to insure them for the world to come. The reverends want to purify their souls. But to little avail, because the *moyshes* and *yakhnes* have their own religion:

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<sup>47</sup> Avreml, 'Moyshe un yakhne', *Tsayt*, 14 November 1913.

<i>Der 'muzik hol' iz dokh bay aykh a 'ganeydn'</i>	The music hall is your paradise
<i>der 'shund-roman' iz bay aykh fun 'khokhme'</i>	The trash novel is your font of wisdom
<i>der kval</i>	
<i>fun 'poker' un 'domino' shept ir taynugim</i>	You draw enjoyment from poker and dominoes
...	...
<i>'hibru komedyens' zenen ayere neviyim</i>	Hebrew comedians are your prophets

The lines contain a rather precarious balance. On one side are the music halls, trash novels, poker, dominoes and 'Hebrew' comedians. On the other side are a range of religious concepts and terminology: *ganeydn*, *khokhme*, *taynugim*, *neviyim*. The *shund* culture is intriguing because it suggests that the *moyshes* and *yakhnes* are audiences for both Yiddish and Anglo-Jewish popular culture. The 'Hebrew' comedians perform in English, portraying Jews in the English music halls. Finkelshteyn's article 'Hibru komedyes' deplores the way English audiences enjoy the stereotyped Jew cracking jokes, yet 'even the Jews were strongly inspired by the "Hebrew comedian"'s wisecracks and they drummed with their feet as if they wanted to hear it again.'<sup>48</sup> Avreml's comment in his poem shows the muddied waters of anglicisation, as the lowest form of English culture is imbibed by the immigrants.

The poem also refers to the three religions vying for the immigrants: the Anglo-Jewish rabbinate, the immigrant orthodox and the Christian missionaries. The implication is that none of them succeed and that everyone is dancing to the tune of the most unthinking and vulgar in the immigrant society, and those who have no interest in religion. The *moyshes* and *yakhnes* were more likely to be seen at the Yiddish theatre than in synagogue. Indeed, Avreml argues that the music hall is their synagogue. In doing so he implies that religion is not entertaining enough to keep an audience.

Avreml uses the festival of *peysekh* (Passover) as a way of making broader comments. The poem 'Mayn malke' (My Queen) is set in a domestic arena on *seder* night, the first night of Passover. Avreml draws a traditional scene of a Jewish family where every husband is a king sitting on his throne surrounded by his 'queen' and 'princes' who minister to him. They are dressed in the ritual *kitlekh* (white robes) and fine clothes as they relate the story from the *hagode* (seder prayer book) of the plagues inflicted on

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<sup>48</sup> Finkelshteyn, 'Hibru komedyes', 2.

Pharaoh and his government who were drowned in the sea. The poem then turns to the first person narrative and introduces the impoverished poet, whose wife ‘has no dresses and nothing to eat, but apart from that she is a queen, a countess.’ The final verse moans that his beautiful wife, however, will not let him be the king:

*Zi hert mayne bafeln nit  
un shenkt mir ale makes op,  
un brekht di ‘koyses’ oyf mayn kop,  
zi iz a ‘sufrazhetke’.*

She doesn’t listen to my commands  
And sends me lots of plagues,  
And breaks the ritual ‘cups’ of wine on my head,  
She is a ‘suffragette’.<sup>49</sup>

In an amusing twist the queen becomes the bearer of the plagues in order to attain her own freedom. Avreml becomes the dysfunctional husband, unable to make a living in London, similar to the emasculated music-hall comedian. He invites the readership to laugh with him, and question what sort of freedom this year’s Passover will bring. There is a Passover tradition, informed by the seder liturgy, of personalising the struggle for freedom.<sup>50</sup> So by engaging with the fight for votes for women, Avreml finds a place for Jewish religious tradition in the politics of England. Of course the surprise factor of the last line creates the humour and may have implied that immigrant Jewish women were not known for their suffragist activism.<sup>51</sup>

Avreml’s poetry displays the tension between immigrant religious life and the process of acculturation. They are internal fare, dealing with goings-on in the community, laughing at the foibles and pointing out bad behaviour. He constantly demands political engagement in local or national politics. He displays no sympathy for Anglo-Jewry, is a little more generous to the radicals, and lampoons everyone. By engaging with politics through using religious imagery and text, Avreml makes repeated points. He demands that Jewish life is not isolated, but develops its day-to-day religion in line with the politics of the surrounding community. Between 1911 and 1913 his satirical poetry may be seen as an attempt to create an Anglo-immigrant traditional religion which is inclusive of Yiddish politics and Anglo-Yiddish culture.

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<sup>49</sup> Avreml, ‘Mayn malke’, *Blofer*, Vol 13, April 1912.

<sup>50</sup> The seder liturgy asks people to see themselves as if they had personally come out of Egypt.

<sup>51</sup> It should be noted that in November 1912 the Jewish League for Woman Suffrage was established. See Linda Gordon Kuzmack, *Woman’s Cause: The Jewish Woman’s Movement in England and the United States, 1881-1933* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1990), 134–42.



### *Dem melameds geshrey: internal religious wars*

Avreml was not the only poet to address local religious debate in Whitechapel. Although a religious paper, the *Idisher ekspres*, did not shy away from criticism directed at orthodox behaviour. The anonymous poem ‘Haneros halalu’ (These Candles) uses Hanukkah as a way of criticising orthodox immigrant priorities.<sup>52</sup> The poem describes Hanukkah as a time when ‘we celebrate the remembrance of heroism’, the history of when Jews fought for freedom with bravery. But it asks what heroism there is today in the immigrant community:

<i>Aponim mir zenen danen andersh geven a folk fun giburim, fun gvure a yid iz geven oyfn shlakht feld a bren un nit nur gehit “matse shmure”... Amol zenen yidn gegangn in krig farteydikt dem heylikn binyen! Yetst hobn mir nur eyn eyntsign zig: ven mir davnen yedn tog mit a minyen... Mir hobn milkhomes yedn shabes in yor nur alts in di shuln, di shuln.</i>	Apparently then we were different, A nation of heroes, of heroism. A Jew on the battlefield had fervour. And didn’t only protect <i>shmure</i> matzah... Once Jews went to war, Defending the holy temple! Now we only have one single aim: We should pray every day in a minyan... We have wars every Sabbath of the year Just everything in the synagogues, the synagogues. <sup>53</sup>
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The satire is directed at the immigrant orthodox for not seeing the wood for the trees. Compared with Hanukkah’s heroism, the struggles of the orthodox immigrant community look petty. It suggests that concern with trivia is un-heroic behaviour, however the struggles the poem flags up are not trivial. Matzah for Passover and needing a group of ten men to pray are basic tenets of orthodox Judaism. The attack seems to be that these key elements of Judaism are belittled by becoming fierce synagogue battles. In the last lines of the poem the narrator asks the orthodox what will become of the Jews. The orthodox relinquish responsibility and reply: ‘the Messiah will come.’ The poem berates the community for un-thinking faith and small-minded behaviour.

Orthodox poets frequently criticised synagogue squabbling and religious insularity. Internal religious structures of synagogues and schooling, kosher food and community institutions made many jobs available in the community, for the community. Working in a community job, it could seem as if one was cushioned in a Yiddish-speaking bubble against the outside world. The poem ‘Vos toygn di lider’ (What good are poems), lists possibilities for employment internally. The anonymous poet bemoans the difficulty of

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<sup>52</sup> The title ‘Haneros halalu’ is the name of a prayer recited or sung after lighting the Hanukkah candles.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Haneros Halalu’, *IE*, 15 December 1909.

making money as a community poet writing in Yiddish, and surveys other jobs he could do within the community that pay badly, but better than a poet's meagre pay.<sup>54</sup> He could be a *mashgiyakh*, an inspector of *kharoyeses and morer* (foods for Passover that need to be made under special guidance). He could go round from house to house with a letter from a famous rabbi collecting money for the poor. He could study in a *yeshiva* paid for by the community. He could be a *memune*, a supervisor of a Jewish charity. He could amass gold ducats by being a *bal-nesnik*, a miracle worker divining through using the ritual cup that Jews use to wash their hands every morning. Or he could earn 25 shillings a week to work in a dirty *kheyder* teaching 'fifty bandits'. The only downside of working in an orthodox job in the orthodox immigrant community is that you had to be orthodox yourself, and the poet then moans that he would have to 'grow a beard'. *Vos toygn di lider* is a comic poem suggesting that the community is, indeed, insular, paying more money and attention to internal religious jobs than to a critical poet.

A serious complaint about working in the community comes up in an untitled poem with the first line 'Dem melameds geshrey' (The Teacher's Cry). The poem concerns the lack of esteem in which private *melamdim*, religion teachers, are held, and the consequent poor pay. The poem reveals the tension between the orthodox immigrants and the traditional immigrants and the value put on Jewish education. In a short letter to the *Idisher ekspres* in October 1906, M Coyen raised the question of religious teachers' pay. The letter differentiated between *kheyder* teachers who were paid when they started to teach after the festival of *sukes*, which is in the Autumn and coincides with the new academic year, and the Brick Lane *talmtoyre* teachers who started teaching ten days earlier before Yom Kippur, but did not get paid for the extra time. Coyen questioned why the *Talmtoyre* teachers were paid less than the *kheyder* teachers and also asked the teachers themselves why they were silent and did not complain. The letter was followed by the seventeen-verse poem 'Der melameds geshrey', which provided a more detailed background to the complaint, arguing that there was a lack of respect for religion teachers in the community and consequent lack of respect for Judaism:

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<sup>54</sup> 'Vos toygn di lider', *IE*, 28 September 1909.

*Az lernen mit kinder  
vilde khayes un rinder  
iz gornit kayn kindershpil.*

...  
*Bay undz yidn leyder  
di ernste fun kheyder  
zaynen di melamdim aleyrn.*

Teaching children  
Wild animals and cattle  
Is no child's play.

...  
Unfortunately amongst us Jews  
The most serious in the *kheyder*  
Are the teachers themselves.<sup>55</sup>

Coyen is dismayed by parents' view of *kheyder* teaching as an 'add-on' that can be sacrificed for any caprice:

*Ven es felt  
a bisl kleyn gelt  
eyn ovent in teatr tsu geyn  
di ershte svore  
dem kheyder a kapore  
dos filit nur der melamed aleyrn.*

When one is short of  
A bit of cash  
To go the theatre one evening  
The first idea  
Is to sacrifice the *kheyder*  
It is only the teacher that feels it.

Coyen argues that people see the teacher's livelihood as expendable. They will spend what the teacher earns in a week for a one-day holiday by the sea. Yet the teacher is dependent on private individuals paying him. The poem's message argues that anglicisation has changed peoples' priorities. Parents' desire for their children to go to *kheyder* is lip service, and an expendable expense. This leaves the Yiddish teacher in a precarious position, relying on those for whom the importance of Judaism is in decline.

Coyen also chastises the teachers themselves, arguing that they must unite across institutions and modernise their teaching methods in order to gain respect. The final verse is a rousing cry:

*Zet tsu makhn  
men zol mer nisht lakhn  
fun di lerer fun toyre un religyon:  
men zol gut bashitsn  
mit koved bapitsn  
di vos trogn di yidishe fon.*

Let it be that  
People should no longer laugh  
At the teachers of Torah and religion:  
One should protect well  
Adorn with respect  
Those that carry the Jewish flag.

Coyen portrayed Judaism as something precious that needed protecting. The agents of passing on religious knowledge were the *melamdim*. However, Judaism would only survive if teachers found ways to communicate with pupils using modern teaching

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<sup>55</sup> M Coyen, Untitled (Dem melamed's geshrey), *IE*, 17 October 1906.

methods.<sup>56</sup> The poem is a two-way demand. On one side it demands that religious and nominally religious parents treat the transmission of Judaism as seriously as their dedication to the process of anglicisation. On the other side it demands that Yiddish teachers take modernisation as seriously as the maintenance of Judaism. This was no lone complaint. In an article some years later, B. Verbi links poor *kheyder* tuition and lack of family support for Jewish education to the popularity of *shund*, implying that good tuition is necessary to appreciate and support both Jewish learning and high art.<sup>57</sup>

The orthodox immigrants were keen to become a community acculturated to England, but just as keen to distance themselves from the established Anglo-Jewish community whose style of anglicisation was berated in the poetry.

### ***Ikh un krist: the religion of Anglo-Jewry***

Some Yiddish satirists turned their poetic attention to the Anglo-Jewish community, criticising their lack of orthodoxy. The poem *Hepi nyu yir* is directed at the ‘rich uncles with stuffed bellies and empty hearts’ of ‘our big London community’. The title ‘Happy New Year’ refers to the secular new year, that is the turn of 1914, and airs acute anxiety about what anglicisation is doing to Jewish practice:

*A kxanuke likhtl in eyn hant  
oyf di lipn ‘maoz tsur’  
in der tsveyter hant a yolke  
un a pudink mit rozhinkes gor*

A Hanukkah light in one hand  
On the lips ‘Maoz tsur’  
In the second hand a Christmas tree  
And a pudding made entirely of raisins.<sup>58</sup>

This form of anglicised Judaism, the poem tells us, ‘has subsumed the non-Jew’ and the ‘spark of Judaism’ will be forgotten forever.<sup>59</sup> This anxiety is different to that aired in the music halls about immigrants losing their orthodoxy in England. The poem is a critique arguing that Anglo-Jewry has become so assimilated, it has become Christianised, and that Judaism will not survive. It is a withering critique suggesting that one cannot be both Jewish and English, or rather Jewish and Christian at the same time.

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<sup>56</sup> Tananbaum describes the push to modernise Talmud Torahs and the dispute around using Yiddish. Tananbaum, *Immigrants in London*, 98–9.

<sup>57</sup> B. Verbi, ‘Teatr krizis’, *IE*, 19 June 1912, 2.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Hepi nyu yir’, *IE*, 31 December 1913.

<sup>59</sup> *Ma Yafit* (How Beautiful) is the title and first words of a Friday night song that Polish Jews used to sing to a melody that was popular with Eastern European nobles. A *Ma Yafit Yid* is someone who abases himself to non-Jews with flattery and grovelling. Yitzkhok Niborski, *Verterbukh fun loshn-koydesh shtamike verter in yidish* (Paris: Bibliotech Medem, 1999), 151.

A number of poems allude to the flirtation between distinguished Anglo-Jews and Christianity. The poem 'Mist' (Trash) refers to a priest disguising himself as a rabbi and luring Rothschild into a church to make a speech.<sup>60</sup> 'Al hanisim' (For The Miracles) alludes to Claude Montefiore giving away a Christmas tree. Montefiore was a greatly respected though controversial thinker in the Anglo-Jewish community. He was the founder of Liberal Judaism, yet incorporated Christian theology into his thinking.<sup>61</sup>

The anxiety about the connection between Anglo-Jewish practice and Christianity is given specific detail in the poem 'Di reformer'. The poem describes a new reform synagogue where there is no rabbi but 'a cheerful youth, a bachelor'. The cantor does not sing alone but is accompanied by an organ and a non-Jewish choir. People listen silently and with decorum only opening their mouths for *kadish* and *yisker* (memorial prayers for the dead). People do not wear *yarmulkes* (skullcaps) and, because the preacher preaches with an empty head, his words come out naked. The poem drives home the sterility of the environment of the new synagogue that is formal and symbolic with ritual but not a Judaism that the author recognises.<sup>62</sup>

Part of the anxiety was fuelled by the missionary activity in the East End, which, although a constant feature during the immigration period, was not very successful. 'Ikh un krist' (Myself and Christ) by Morris Gros is a thirteen-verse ballad.<sup>63</sup> It is a narrative tale about missionary activity. However, here the tone is light. The missionary bribes the Jew to become a Christian for a thousand pounds. The Jew delightedly accepts, but is then caught out eating chicken one Friday night. With quick wit the Jew explains that just as he was easily baptised with a drop of water to turn from a Jew to a Christian, so his Friday meal has been baptised to change from a hen into a fish. The humour of the poem was directed at the clever immigrant Jews who manage to fool the missionaries. The critique of Anglo-Jewry was not that Jews would become Christians but that Judaism would become Christian.

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<sup>60</sup> 'Mist', *Blofer*, Vol 9, January 1912.

<sup>61</sup> Avreml, 'Al hanisim', *Tsayt*, 26 December 1913.

<sup>62</sup> 'Al hanisim', *Fonograf*, 17 January 1908.

<sup>63</sup> Moris Gros, 'Ikh un krist', *Blofer*, Vol 18, June 1912.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored how religious ideas and language are used and manipulated in the songs and poems of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture both to draw in a religious audience and to provide a critique of religious practice. Although the texts come from different perspectives, they all argue for the need for transformation. This may be from a political standpoint or from a desire to modernise. Religious life was changing and these texts can be seen as part of that change, and a part of the process of anglicisation and modernisation. The texts both engage with the debate and reflect the changing positions that people held.

The socialists' main aim was to turn religious workers into atheist socialists. They re-worked religious texts to put across socialist rather than religious ideas. Although the poems may have drawn in religious workers with familiar terminology and concepts, the content argued against religion, showing religion as a false consciousness and offering a socialist world picture in its place. For the socialists, the religious framework was used solely as a device to encourage abandonment of those religious concepts.

The music hall songs tell stories of the loss of religion, some humorous, some poignant. They offer narratives of orthodox immigrants shocked at the freedom in England to abandon religious practice. Yet the songs also seem to posit a new status quo, that in the music halls one can be a non-religious Jew. The audience in the halls would have been able to see themselves in the secular characters of the songs. The songs were not berating them for eschewing religious mores, rather showing English ways as up-to-date and modern.

The poems from traditional religious writers offer a different critique. Avreml uses religious concepts, such as the text of the *al khey*t prayer to critique both the prayer itself and make political points about behaviour in the Whitechapel community. He, and other writers, do not seem to be suggesting abandoning religion, rather modernising, anglicising, making the old Eastern European model a new version relevant to England.

Despite the desire for anglicisation that cuts across all of these texts, the model of Anglo-Jewry is thoroughly rejected. The socialists show Anglo-Jewry as holding an oppressive role in the class system arguing that unity be based on class not race. Both

the music-hall and religious immigrant writers make fun of the Englishness of Anglo-Jewish religious practice, portraying Anglo-Jewry as aping Christian structures of prayer.

By using religious themes and concepts, all three groups of writers can be seen to acknowledge the huge influence and place of religion in the lives of the immigrants. Whether they were trying to move away or re-establish a modern world, all the texts look forward. They may abandon religion, but not the knowledge of it. They may decry the relevance of religious texts but still use them. They may eat on Yom Kippur, but still know the meaning of the day and use that as a muse.

## Conclusion

This thesis has expanded what we know about certain aspects of Anglo-Jewish history. Through the lyrics of popular songs and poetry, the themes of politics, sex and religion have been given additional nuance to that contained in existing historiography. Politics has had considerable scholarly attention, yet Winchevsky's poetry shows the process of how a radical ideology was communicated in an attempt to influence the thoughts of immigrant workers. The variety in the poetry shows a range of strategies for drawing in an individual to understanding political ideas and feeling sympathy for injustices in London's immigrant milieu.

The theme of Sex and relationships has generally only received scholarly intervention around transgressive sex, particularly prostitution. The popular texts refer to changes in the structure of sexual relationships and behaviour within the home and the community; changes not necessarily restricted to London, but produced on the music-hall stage as a part of immigrant experience. When alluding to prostitution, the texts are more oblique, yet the mention of them show that elements of transgressive sex were incorporated into community discussion. The fact that this discussion also happened in the music hall offered an emotional outlet for immigrant audiences.

The nature of immigrant religion and institutional disputes are very present in the historiography. The popular texts, however, greatly nuance this knowledge. They show the in-between, the movement between being religious and not and the compromising and adjustment in trying to maintain religious practice in a modern English world. The texts convey how religious concepts and language structure conceptual thought even from a secular perspective.

Many texts use humour, parody or exaggerated versions of what may have been happening in the London immigrant community. Yet the texts give considerable insight into how aspects of politics, sex and religion were experienced in immigrants' daily lives. By using Yiddish popular culture as primary source texts, the field of popular culture has been opened. This area of history has had scant scholarly attention in the UK, and this thesis has attempted to contribute to the history of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture.



These new areas of scholarship have been framed by three key ideas. Firstly that Anglo-Yiddish popular culture can be seen to be an agent of political debate. The texts participate in political and cultural discourse around a range of subject matter. The creative texts sometimes make clear points and sometimes give surreptitious messages. Yet all advance controversial arguments, referencing pivotal discussions current in national and community politics or the media. Some interventions into these debates may be ideological, some social and some religious. Some may be crucial and others less consequential, yet all were pertinent to the lives of the Yiddish-speaking immigrants to London. Being popular culture, these interventions are not rhetorical or polemical. In the accessibility of the style and the performative elements of the songs, the texts offer an alternate nuance to those debates and offer clues as to the interests of the writers and audience.

Secondly, the poetry and song are directed at, and refer to, both local and transnational audiences. The major focus may be on the Yiddish workers and inhabitants of the East End, yet socialist poetry and music hall song, and even satire, travelled through publications and performances across the Yiddish-speaking world. Sometimes the issues are pertinent to locality, situated in Whitechapel and Stepney, and directed at particular personalities and events. Yet even within this local perspective many of the issues uncovered are general to the immigrant experience, or to the world of the struggling worker. In this way London becomes an exemplification of an idea, and a simple word change can transfer the text to a new country. This mixture of local and transnational shows the importance of seeing London within a wider Yiddish world, within *Ashkenaz*. It removes some of the isolation of seeing London as a backwater, and serves to generalise experience.

Thirdly, the songs and verse all seem to be pushing an anglicisation agenda. The texts promote English culture, modernity and engagement with new ideas. Some of the ideas are controversial, some are mainstream and some were seen as *shund*. Whatever position the texts take on Englishness, they are looking forward and are trying to be a part of a wider popular culture. There is a potency in using popular culture, where messages can be passed through layers of connotation and meaning, insider knowledge and innuendo.

This concluding chapter will draw together examples from all chapters to illustrate how these three points of argument cut across the aspects of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture examined in this thesis.

### **Debate and Cultural Controversy**

The way the texts participate in political and social debate looks very different depending on the genre of popular text. Both Winchevsky and Nager write about prostitution, which was the subject of ongoing and extensive debate in London. It was discussed in London society and written about openly in the newspapers. Winchevsky's contribution to the debate is in the form of a lyrical poem, 'Dray Shvester'. It is open and clear and does not hide the subject matter or his political position. His point is that poverty leads to prostitution and that society is the problem, not individuals. This is not stated as a polemic by a journalist writing an article but comes from the narrative of the poem, out of the mouths of the three sisters selling their wares in Leicester Square. The poem is sentimental but the point is unambiguous and strong. This stands in contrast to the way Nager explores the same theme in the music-hall songs 'Viktorye park' and 'Vos geyst nisht ahem sore gitl?' Here, prostitution is merely alluded to by references to women 'working in the City' or wandering alone at night in Regent Street. The London audience may grasp the insinuations immediately, yet the songs are light and comic and the innuendos are not lingered on. Nager's songs question sexual mores but do not make bold political statements. Yet by hiding the references to prostitution, they are flagging up the issue as a dangerous one not to be spoken about openly. These two interventions into the debate on prostitution by Winchevsky and Nager show the attempts to include the immigrant community in the wider London world.

In another example, Markovitsh and the writer under the pseudonym Zimrey Ben Sloa both address the subject of abandoned wives. This was particularly seen as an immigrant issue and debated in the pages of both the Anglo-Jewish and Yiddish press. Markovitsh's sentimental music-hall song gives voice to the wife abandoned in Russia. The narrative shows the clear message that abandoning one's wife creates huge hardship back in Eastern Europe. It is a moving song that demands a sympathetic response, yet does not put across any clear judgement in the telling of the story. Indeed, the audience are encouraged to both cry at the wife's misfortune and laugh at her swearing at her husband. In contrast, a verse of 'Der blofer lakht', which describes the

same issue, has a much sharper edge. Again it is humorous, but also angry. The satire is directed at naming and shaming, and it is the author who is calling the names.

These examples show both national and internal debates, yet there are also contributions that show the cultural dissonance between sections of the community. One aspect of cultural controversy was around attitudes to differing religious practice. A. Coyen's untitled poem beginning 'Dem melameds geshrey' portrays the problems encountered between immigrant orthodox and traditional immigrant families who have lost a strong affiliation to religion. Coyen fights for the rights of orthodox teachers by describing the tensions and disappointments that arise from changing religious mores. Different issues around religion are flagged up in Winchevsky's poems. 'Rabiner and mashiner' argues that Anglo-Jewish rabbinic authority is class-ridden and distanced from ordinary religious immigrants. And 'A khoydesh on arbayt' attacks the immigrant orthodox for defining religious respect through ability to buy synagogue honours. These three poems between them consider a range of tensions within the religious debate.

Another example of cultural controversy concerns the tension between high art and popular culture. Avreml's poem 'Moyshe un yakhne' attacks *shund* by mocking the audiences who are only looking for mindless entertainment. Avreml suggests that these audiences lower the tone of the East End and, despite efforts to offer them higher culture, they religiously follow their pop stars and comedians. Not only to Yiddish music halls, but Avreml accuses them of frequenting the English music halls where Anglo-Jewish comedians uphold stage stereotypes of Jews. Yet Avreml only gently mocks the writers of these popular songs, such as Nager, who are producing songs overflowing with crude innuendo. The debate on culture is not straightforward, as the popular songwriters are rarely music-hall consumers. Indeed, writers layer their verse with literary references and contributions to political debates that muddy the waters. This grey area can be seen most clearly in Yozeff's two 'Hashiveynu nazad' parodies. Yozeff re-writes the lyrics of a famous theatre song to advertise his bookshop, and to sell songbooks of Anglo-Yiddish music-hall songs with sexy lyrics. The song flags up the pop singer idols and strongly pushes buying the songs that they have heard them sing in the halls. Yet, printed on the songsheet, Yozeff also advertises religious artefacts for sale in his shop. On one hand Yozeff is simply addressing a wide audience of immigrants who may sit on both sides of the popular culture debate. On the other hand it does suggest that the debates are not always consistent.

These examples serve to show that it is not only that popular cultural texts engage with debate but, depending on the genre and the writer, they target their political points very differently. What is important to conclude is that writers are not only concerned with getting messages across but in locating them within a discourse. The discourse may be English politics or it may be internal Jewish or immigrant politics. It may locate in debates happening in England, yet they may have wider implications and associations.

### **Local and Transnational**

Between 1884 and 1914 most of the Anglo-immigrant audience would have been first generation immigrants and Yiddish their mother tongue. Even if they were second generation, they would probably still have spoken Yiddish as their first language, developing their bilinguality with English. The immigrant community was steeped in the transnational mix of being in England and trying to find work in London's East End and their cultural background and familial ties from the *heyms* of Eastern Europe. It is therefore no surprise that the texts reflect this cultural mix. But in this case ideology seems to be important in how that cultural mix is exemplified in the texts.

The socialist poets were internationalists, and the message in their poetry was not confined to any locality or any cultural group. The message was international socialism that knew no borders and was applicable to all societies. Therefore, even when the socialists used local content, such as a girl selling matches in the pouring rain in Cornhill, the message can be taken as a universal statement about society's refusal to look at or take responsibility for the poverty around it. London's landmarks simply become a backdrop. Similarly, Winchevsky's 'Der frayhayts-gayst', written to be chanted on an East End union demonstration, could then be transferred to a Chicago rally or a secret meeting in Odessa or Warsaw.

The ability for texts to travel was also true of music-hall songs. Music-hall songs were usually written for, and became the property of, particular singers and they became associated with their repertoire. A song sung by Beki Goldshteyn was generally hers alone and she was the darling of the London Yiddish stage. When songsheets were printed the author and the singer were mentioned, and sometimes a picture of the performer. Singers travelled across the Yiddish-speaking world taking their songs with

them. So songwriters had to be pragmatic, making sure that local references in the lyrics could be easily changed. A song like ‘Azoy geyt dos gelt avek’ could simply remove the reference to Crystal Palace. So local became transnational in transmission and in collaboration with new audiences.

The texts that travelled least were the satirical offerings in the *Blofer* where references to local personalities are often detailed and personal. However, ideas were constantly pilfered between Yiddish papers amid complaints as to the practice, and we can assume that the bad behaviour exposed in the satire was similar in other Yiddish centres. All of the texts from the three genres layered allusions to local, national, transnational in location, in language and in cultural references. The texts are embedded with the complex entanglements of being an Eastern European, a Jew, an immigrant and a Yiddish speaker. They allude to ideologies, religious practice, Russian and English literatures. They exude both the region of *Ashkenaz* and the links to the Gentile worlds they are embedded within.

### **Anglicisation**

The Anglo-Yiddish songs and texts were written in the language of the immigrants. It was an obvious choice for all the writers, but for the Yiddish socialists it was also a pragmatic strategy. In the 1880s, Yiddish was considered a domestic rather than literary language, so not a language of progress and modernity where new ideas were being developed. Writing in Russian or German or English connected both writer and reader to a rich literary history, but the Yiddish literary tradition was still in an embryonic stage. The socialists chose Yiddish because their message was more important than the medium. They translated classics of literature and serialised them in the Yiddish press. Their version of acculturation was not about England per se, but about moving forward into a new political future. Just as using Yiddish was a pragmatic choice, so was engaging with English culture. As internationalists they were not pursuing anglicisation as much as addressing modernity. Winchevsky took pains to use a style of Yiddish the workers could understand, berating William Morris for language that was too complex and poetic. Similarly, Winchevsky references London politics and events both to encourage workers to be activists in London but also to exemplify wider issues or socialist ideas. Socialist poetry promotes a class analysis and revolution, not a form of

modernity that was being pushed by any of the other Yiddish writers, and a view fiercely opposed by many.

The form of anglicisation that comes up in music-hall songs is not a force for political change, but for entertainment. Local references and anglicised language are very common, finding aspects of London reality to make fun of and provoke laughter. Tired immigrant workers were not paying their hard-earned money to be given lectures or analysis. They went to the music halls seeking relaxation, an opportunity to meet the opposite sex, drink alcohol, hear their favourite stars and learn some good songs to sing on the way out. The song lyrics propound different versions of Englishness, that include possibilities for new sexual mores and are non-judgemental about the decline of religion. The music halls themselves can be seen as locations of anglicisation, and what was seen by progressives and critics as the lowest form of popular entertainment. The music hall songs may have promoted pleasure and given audiences a sense of solidarity at being non-religious Jews making their way in England. This type of anglicisation was fiercely rejected by both the Anglo-Jewish and immigrant leaders.

By 1913–14 the satire that was being written and published in the *Blofer*, *Tsayt* and *Idisher ekspres* was directly engaging with anglicisation. Most of the satire is critical of immigrant society. It criticises the foibles of leaders of the community: thoughtlessness, bad behaviour, deception, corruption and arrogance. The poems promote finding new ways of being Jews in England, not aping the Anglo-Jewish establishment with its upper class English norms. Instead finding a more progressive way, not imposing but creating new ways to be Jewish in London.

If this popular culture, taken as a whole, were successful in its aim of anglicisation, its existence as a genre would have slowly reduced and disappeared into English popular culture or Jewish popular culture in English. This is, indeed, what happened over a number of decades as the number of first-language Yiddish speakers diminished. Although the Yiddish theatre continued, and at times blossomed, after the second world war it was inevitable that there would never be enough Yiddish-speaking actors. The success of the anglicisation process not only meant the loss of an Anglo-Yiddish popular culture but also a loss of access to that culture as historical evidence and analysis.

## **Final Thoughts**

In the three genres of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture described in this thesis: poetry, song and satire, writers engaged with their new lives in England. The texts serve as a critique of both Anglo-Jewry and aspects of the immigrant community, depending on the point of view of the author. Winchevsky was critical of immigrant master tailors. Avreml was critical of immigrants who abandoned Judaism. All these writers understood that having to make a life in England is a compromise. It is a compromise on religion, culture and language. It is this struggle that is reflected in the poems and songs as they portray the complexity of religious and political debates and cultural controversy. The language itself reflects the developing acculturation to England, as anglicised words pepper the songs and satirical verse. The texts offer tantalising glimpses into a rapidly changing immigrant culture. They act like a mirror, albeit a distorting mirror, through the desire to advertise, affect opinion or entertain, yet they make the culture live. Knowledge of the performative element of the music-hall songs and the sung socialist choruses enhances the meaning. The shared insider knowledge created in the atmosphere of crowds and music halls exposes the live issues that concerned immigrant families and workers.

Although generally hidden and inaccessible today, the popular culture of the immigrant Jews in England can be used as a historical instrument. It nuances aspects of history that are hard to reach from other sources: the nature of entertainment; the socialists' use of humour and creativity in their determination to convince; the internal back-biting, and the intensely personal. The texts, when made accessible, can still draw one in with their comedy, their ideas and their rhyming couplets. The techniques for humour, for diversion and for sharp comment can still be piquant today. The songs and poems offer a new reading of Anglo-Jewish history through this compelling and animated aspect of Anglo-Yiddish popular culture.

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## Appendix 1: Location of Anglo-Yiddish poems and songs

### Socialist Poetry

Most socialist poetry in this thesis is by Morris Winchevsky (MW).

Notitsn do not have titles, so are listed as Notits, followed by the first few words.

Poem	Author	Publication	Date
310	Namerts [Sayman Friman]	AF	15 May, 1889
A bezem un a ker	MW	AF	11 October 1889
A khoydesh on arbayt	MW	PY	31 October 1884
A meydele in der siti	MW	Tsukunft	27 March 1885
Akhdes	MW	AF	29 August 1890
Alt un yung	Izak Likhtnshvayg	AF	25 September 1896
Der farfroyene	MW	AF	23 January 1891
Der frayhayts-gayst	MW	AF	27 June 1890
Der veker tsu di kemfer	MW	Veker	23 December 1892
Di lempelekh	MW	SY (MPC)	
Di oreme maria	MW	AF	25 October 1889
Di tsukunft	MW	Freiheit	1905 (dated 1892)
Dos lid funem hemd	MW	PY	29 August 1884
Dray shvester	MW	FV	October 1891
Es rirt zikh	MW	AF	12 June 1886
In kamf	MW	FV	Oct 1891
Kamf gezang	MW	Veker	23 December 1892
Kines oder arbayter klogelider	Reuel, Yeser, Yisro et al.	Workers Friend	1888
London bay nakht	MW	PY	12 September 1884
Mayn arbeter-muze	MW	Yk	May-52
Mayne lider	MW	AF	13 February 1891
Moyre shkhoyre	MW	FV	Sep 1892
Notits - der liberale zogt	MW	FV	July 1892
Notits - ven england	MW	FV	July 1891
Notits - ven mentshn	MW	FV	July 1891
Notits - zey gib a penny	MW	FV	Aug-Sep 1891
Notits - zey tseylen	MW	FV	May 1891
Nur dos nit	MW	AF	30 January 1891
Oreme yosele	MW	Tsukunft	16 January 1885
Oyfn strend	MW	LUG	1910
Party politik	MW	FV	July 1892
Rabiner un mashiner	MW	AF	17 August 1888
Reb yudl far got	Bonfeld of Glasgow	AF	24 July 1896
Rent	MW	AF	15 December 1885
Rikblik oyf dem altn yor	MW	PY	26 September 1884
Tsu di arbayter (nokh a tsuruf)	MW	AF	27 February 1891
Tsu di raykhe	MW	Tsukunft	6 February 1885
Tsum arbayter fraynd	MW	Freiheit	1895, 10-11 (1885)
Tsum meshugenem filozof	Dovid Edelshtadt	AF	March 1890
Tsum nayem yor	MW	AF	3 January 1890
Tsvey geslekh	MW	PY	15 August 1884
Tzvey veltn	MW	FV	May 1891
Vi raykhe layt lebn	MW	Veker	23 December 1892

## Music-Hall Songs

This list includes all songs mentioned in the text, and different versions of those songs. It includes those analysed in detail and those merely footnoted. For complete references of recordings, refer to the bibliography.

<b>Title of song</b>	<b>Writer</b>	<b>Publication</b>	<b>Location</b>
A boytshik ap to deyt	Yozeffson	SM	MPC
A finfter hashiveynu nazad	Yozeff	SY	MPC
A firter hashiveynu nazad	Yozeff	LLM, 14	NLI
A het oder a get	Adapted by Beki Goldshteyn (?)	LK, 6-7	NLI
A het oder a get	Louis Gilrod	Lid magazin (NY) vol 13	YIVO
A kholem	Markovitsh	IE, 27 November 1953	
Aheym tsurik	Markovitsh	Unpub. manuscript	MPC
Azoy geyt di gelt avek	n.k.	SG	MPC
Azoy geyt dos gelt avek	n.k.	LK, 52	NLI
Azoy geyt dos gelt avek	n.k.	Yidishe teatr lider, 42-3	YIVO
Brivelekh fun rusland	Markovitsh	LK, 31	NLI
Der bal-tovnik	Nager (adapted from Isaac Reingold)	LK, 8-9	NLI
Der dansing skul	Nager	LK, 107	NLI
Der dzhob	Nager	LK, 9-11	NLI
Der nayem hashiveynu nazad (see also 'Hashiveynu nazad')	n.k.	Shmeruk 'Dray gasnlider', 117-9	
Der odeser pogrom'	Yozeff	LK, 123	NLI
Di barimte lid fun kishinyever pogrom	Goldberg	SG	MPC
Di boyern krig mit england	Avrom Simironsky	S (unknown)	MPC
Di velt iz meshuge	n.k.	SY	MPC
Dos troyerike lid fun keshenever pogrom	Yozeff Semilson	SY	MPC
Er meynt yenem nit zikh aleyn	Yozeff	LK, 32	NLI
Freg kayn katshanes	Nager	LLM, 9-10	NLI
Fri ov tshardzh	n.k.	LLM, 12-13	MPC
Genendel	Nager	LK, 122	NLI
Gevalt es iz a shlekhte tsayt	n.k.	SY	MPC
Gevalt es iz a shlekhte tsayt	n.k.	Yidishe bine, 214-6	YIVO
Gevalt, police.	n.k.	Recording	
Haf past nayn	n.k.	SG	MPC
Hashiveynu nazad (same text as 'Der nayem hashiveynu nazad')	n.k.	LK, 156-7	NLI
Helio, Hello	n.k.	Unpub. recording	Reid
Ich such a job	n.k.	Recording	
Ikh bin a yidl fun der lite	Markovitsh	LK, 106	NLI
Laytudl laytudl day day	Yozeff	SY	NLI
Lize klaf (sketch)	Yozeff	SY	MPC
Lizzie Clough (a boytshik ap to deyt)	Yozeffson	Unpub. recording	Reid
London hot zikh ibergekert	Sam Levenvirt	LK, 129	NLI
Malke, malke	Nager	LK, 115	NLI
Mazel	Markovitsh	LLM	MPC
Moyshes kum efn mir dem shlos	Markovitsh	LK, 93-5	NLI

Opgeklapte hoyshayne	Finkelshteyn	SM	MPC
Orem vey is der mamen	n.k.	S-Ikbo molev	MPC
Plezhur	Nager	LLM, 9-10	MPC
Rum to let	Nager	LK, 103	NLI
Tsvey doyles	n.k.	LLM, 11	MPC
Ver zukht a kale	n.k.	LK, 111	NLI
Viktorye park	Nager	LLM, 15	NLI
Victoria Park	Nager	Unpublished recording	Reid
Vos geyst nisht aheym sore gitl	Nager	LK, 16	NLI

## Satirical Verse

The pseudonym 'Avreml' is the editor of the *Blofer*, Avrom Margolin. The pseudonym 'Zimri ben Salu' may also have been written by Margolin. The style is similar and Margolin wrote much of the *Blofer* content.

Title	Author	Publication	Date
A pekel neviyes	Avreml	Blofer 3	November 1911, 5-6
Al hanisim	Avreml	Tsayt	26 December 2013
Al hanisim	n.k.	Fonograf	17 January 1908
Al kheytn motivn	Avreml	Tsayt	10 October 1913
Der blofer lakht	Zimri ben Salu	Blofer 4	November 1911, 12
Der blofer lakht	Zimri ben Salu	Blofer 5	December 1911, 11
Der blofer lakht	Zimri ben Salu	Blofer 6	December 1911, 16
Der blofer lakht	Zimri ben Salu	Blofer 12	March 1912, 8
Der blofer lakht	Zimri ben Salu	Blofer 13	April 1912, 6
Di simkhes toyre trinker	Avreml	IE	2 October 1912
Haneros halalu	n.k.	IE	15 December 1909
Hashiveynu nazad	n.k.	Blofer 34	May 1913, 12
Hepi nyu yir	n.k.	IE	31 December 1913
Ikh un krist	Moris Gros	Blofer 18	June 1912, 11
Mayn malke	Avreml	Blofer 13	April 1912, 6
Mist	L.A.L.A.	Blofer 9	January 1912, 9
Moyshe un yakhne	Avreml	Tsayt	14 November 1913
Untitled (Dem melamed's geshrey)	M. Coyen	IE	17 October 1906
Vos toygn di lider	n.k.	IE	28 September 1909

## Appendix 2: London immigrant personalities mentioned in the thesis

These biographies are mostly drawn from Prager *Yiddish Culture in Britain* (P) and Zylbercweig *Leksikon fun yidishn teater* (Z).

Adler, Jacob: Born 1877, Odessa. He had a long career as actor and manager, becoming a famous star across the Yiddish world and seen as the ‘King’ of the Yiddish stage. Between 1883 and 1887 he lived in London. He set up a theatre in Houndsditch: the Russian Hebrew Workman’s Club and later the Princes Street Club. He also established a Yiddish drama and music school. (P, 101–2; Rosenfeld, *Bright Star*; Moris Mayer, *Idish teatr in London*, 253).

Akselrod, Moris: Born 1879, Jassy, Romania. London Yiddish actor from 1901 touring Uk and abroad. Nicknamed ‘The Jewish Dan Leno’. His wife Mine also performed in the Yiddish theatre. (P, 105–6).

Alman, Shmuel: Born 1877, Russia. Came to London in 1903 to study at the Guildhall School of Music. Became choirmaster at the Great Synagogue, Duke’s Place composing liturgical music. He translated Verdi’s *Rigoletto* into Yiddish, to be performed at the Faynman Yiddish Theatre. (P, 109–10).

Avreml: See Avrom Margolin.

Blaykhman, Yankev: Born 1870, Fokshan, Romania. Well-known comic actor performing across Europe from the 1880s. A frequent visitor to London. (Z, 1:181. For a translation of Z, see: <http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/yt/lex/B/bleichman-jacob.htm>).

Brin, Max: Born 1884. Character actor in London, 1909. (P, 174).

Finkelshteyn, Y: Wrote articles for the Yiddish press and is the author of the song ‘Opgeklapte hoyshayne’. (P, 239).

Friman, Sayman (Namerts): Born 1862, Lithuania. Came to London 1889. Writer for the socialist press and theatre. (P, 254).

Goldshteyn, Beki: Born 1877, Mlavo, Poland. Came to London 1901. A character actress on the London Yiddish stage and touring across the Yiddish world. She was married to Joseph Markovitsh. (P, 287; Z, 2:377).

Gutentag, Karl: Born 1878. Romantic actor in Poland, touring, performed in London, where he met and married Yiddish actress Berte Akselrod. (P, 301).

Gutman, Tsvi: Born 1865, Russia. Converted to Christianity and worked in the Mildmay Mission in London from 1891 with responsibility for Jewish immigrants. (P, 301).

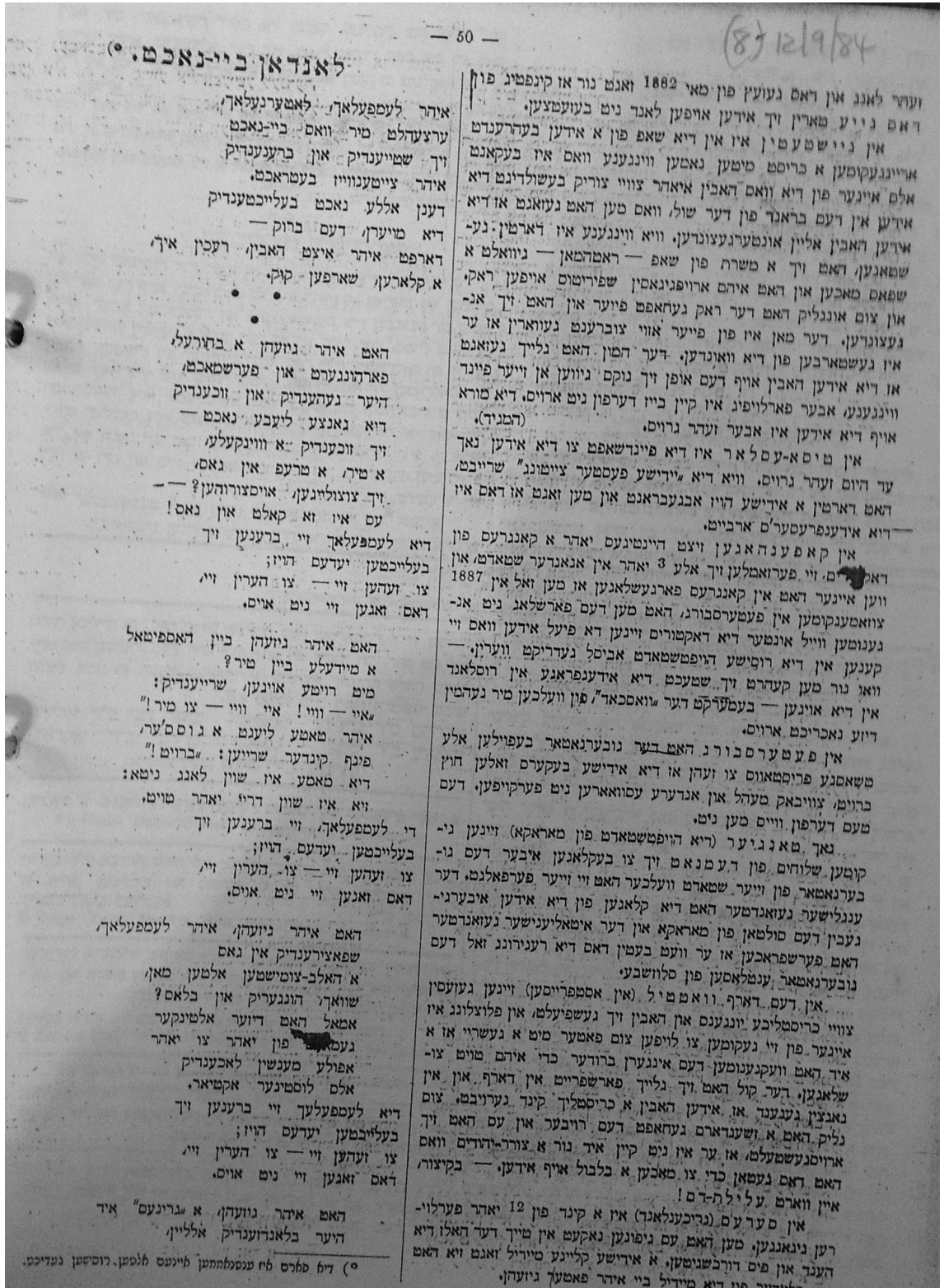
Izraeli, L: See Leon Kusman

Krantz, Filip: Born 1858. Lived in London 1883-90. Was the first editor of the editor of the *arbayer fraynd* 1883-1889.

- Kusman, Leon (L. Izraeli): Born 1884. Journalist in London from 1911 and editor of the *Blofer* from 1913. He wrote articles for the *Idisher ekspres* under the pen name L. Izraeli. He moved to New York in 1913 and worked on the *Morgen zhurnal*. (P, 388–9).
- Lubritski, Isaac: Born c.1859 in Vishegrod, Poland. He was a popular *batkhn* (wedding jester), and continued this work on emigrating to London. He was a prompter in the Pavilion Theatre where his children took acted. He also wrote songs and articles under the pseudonym Izak Batkhn. (P, 426–7, Z, 2:1014)
- Margolin, Avrom (Avreml): Born 1884, Russia. Was a doctor in the British army. Became a writer and edited the *Blofer* in 1912. Went to USA after the war and worked for the Forverts. (P, 437; Yechiel Szeintuch, ‘Bre’i ha’ashmodai’, *Khulyot* 6 (2000): 402–4).
- Markovitsh, Joseph: Born 1882?, Ukraine. Came to London around 1900 already a professional singer. He sang, acted and wrote songs and plays for the Anglo-Yiddish music hall and theatre. (P, 439, Z, 2:1265–6; Mazower, ‘Stories in Song’).
- Mayer, Moris: Born 1879, Romania. Lived in London from 1902. Writer, translator, theatre critic and editor of the *Idisher zhurnal* and *Di tsayt*. (P, 443).
- Nager, Arn: Born 1880. Actor, singer, writer, composer of burlesques and melodramas performed in London. He may have run a music hall in Berner St, East London. He wrote for the *Blofer* and many of his songs (17 known) were published in songbooks and songsheets. (P, 478; Z, 2:1384–6).
- Namerts: See Sayman Friman.
- Rocker, Rudolf: Born 1873, Mainz, Germany. Came to England in 1894. Learned Yiddish and became the leader of the London Jewish anarchists, writing, giving lectures and editing the *Arbayter fraynd* from 1898. (Rocker and Ward, *London Years*).
- Sherman, Yozef: Born 1875, Romania and worked with Goldfaden. He came to London around 1901 as a Yiddish comedian and later played vaudeville in English. (585–6).
- Shtoyb, Ferdinand: Born 1862, Czechoslovakia. Arrived in London 1881. Was a pianist and cellist at the Strand Theatre. In 1886 worked with Jacob Adler’s troupe as piano accompanist and as orchestra conductor at the Pavilion Theatre. (P, 602).
- Vayznfraynd, Sali and Filip: Arrived in London from Poland around 1901. Sali sang in music halls and Filip managed the York Minster music hall. Moved to America 1902. Parents of Paul Muni. (P, 675, Z, 1:672–3).
- Winchevsky, Morris: Born 1856, Lithuania. Lived in London from 1879 -1894. He edited and wrote for the London Yiddish press, sometimes under the pseudonyms Ben Nets (BN) or Leopold Benedict (LB). He wrote a regular column as the *meshugene filozof* in the *Arbayter fraynd* and the *notitsn* in the *Fraye velt*. (For references, see chapter 4).
- Yozef, M: Yiddish printer and publisher, at various addresses in London’s East End. He printed songsheets and composed his own songs or added verses to known songs. Sometimes called Yozef mokher sform. He was an active Zionist. (Prager, *Farleger*, 179–97).



Appendix 3: Images of Primary Source Texts in Yiddish



Winchevsky, 'London bay nakht', Poylishe yidl 12 September 1884



# \* \* \* דער דאַנסיג סקוהל \* \* \*

פֿון אייער בעליבטען פֿערפֿאַסער אונד קופּלעטיסט הערר א. פ. נאַנער.

(קאהר)

— 1 —

אוי דער דאַנסיג סקוהל (ביס)  
זיא גיט מיר פעטש גאה אָן א צאהל  
אוי אידען האב איך א ווייב  
זיא רייסט שטיקער פֿון מיין לייב  
איהר יעדער פֿליק קלינגט נאך דער  
סויזק

זויסט איהר וויא א מידעל גייט טאג  
צען אדער האפטן א מעש  
נאר אין דאַנסיג סקוהל  
העטשעקס מוז זיא צאהלען 3 פענס  
אין קעש

פֿון דעם דאַנסיג סקוהל (ביס)

נאר אין דאַנסיג סקוהל  
דער מיטשער איז א ספּארט גייט גע-  
קלירעט שיון

— 3 —

רייסשיק האט ליעב צוא שפּריינגען  
הויך

ווייל דאס איז א גיט געשעפֿט  
זוען א בחור ווייז ויין מידעל זעהען  
זויסט איה וויא ער זיא טרעפֿט

אין דעם דאַנסיג סקוהל

(קאהר)

ביז זיא האט בעקומען א געשוואלע-  
נעם..... פֿיס

נאר אין דאַנסיג סקוהל (ביס)  
במעט א יעדען ספּארט געפֿינט איר  
אימער דארט

אין דעם דאַנסיג סקוהל

זוען דיא סויזק שפּילט אווי זיס  
הייבען דיא מידען..... דיא הענט  
איך זאג אייך עס איז א פֿראכט  
צוא פֿערברענגען א נאכט

זיא האט געפֿרעגט אַ דאקטאר האט  
ער איהר ערקלעהרט

נאר אין דאַנסיג סקוהל (ביס)

אז זיא דארף זוערען סוטער באלד  
זיזא איהר סאַטע האט דאס דערהערט

— 2 —

האט זיא געמאכט א גרויס געוואלד

(קאהר)

אוי דער דאַנסיג סקוהל (ביס)

מיט א מידעל האב איך מיר א סאַך  
בעקענט

זיזא פֿיל סאהל געזאנט האב איך  
רייסשיל זעה היט דיך

אין דעם דאַנסיג סקוהל  
איך בין געווען א יאלד אויף איהר  
געלד געספענט

עס האט זיך דיר פֿערנלוסט א האפ  
אוי ביסט דיא אין דער ערד מיטן

אין דעם דאַנסיג סקוהל  
איך בין מיט איהר געגאנגען א לאנגע  
צייט

קאפּ  
ניין מאטע איך האב געמאַנצט א סעט  
בין איך געווארען פֿעט

פֿערזיכט בין איך געווען אין איהר  
ענדליך האב איך זיא געהייראט  
יעצט וויין איך אָן א שעור

פֿון דעם דאַנסיג סקוהל (ביס)

Nager, 'Der dansing skul', Londoner kupletist