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A COMPANION TO BRITISH-JEWISH THEATRE SINCE THE 1950S

Edited by
Jeanette R. Malkin, Eckart Voigts
& Sarah Jane Ablett

A Companion to British-Jewish Theatre since the 1950s

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METHUEN DRAMA
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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First published in Great Britain 2021
This paperback edition published 2022

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3501-3596-3
PB: 978-1-3502-1195-7
ePDF: 978-1-3501-3597-0
ePUB: 978-1-3501-3598-7

Series: Methuen Drama Engage

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

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Notes on Contributors

Sarah J. Ablett studied English literature, philosophy and creative writing at the Universities of Hamburg, Manchester, Heidelberg, and Hildesheim, and completed her doctorate at TU Braunschweig, Germany. She has taught literary and cultural studies and was part of the research project 'Hyphenated Cultures: Contemporary British-Jewish Theatre' funded by the VolkswagenStiftung. Her latest publication is a book on *Dramatic Disgust. Aesthetic Theory and Practice from Sophocles to Sarah Kane* (2020).

Nathan Abrams is Professor in Film at Bangor University, UK, where he also directs the Centre for Film, Television and Screen Studies. His most recent books are *Stanley Kubrick: New York Jewish Intellectual* (2018) and (with Robert Kolker) *Eyes Wide Shut: Stanley Kubrick and the Making of His Final Film* (2019). He is currently editing *Kubrick's Mitteleuropa: The Central European Imaginary in the Films of Stanley Kubrick* with Jeremi Szaniawski; *Alien Legacies: The Evolution of a Franchise* with Greg Frame; and *New Wave, New Hollywood: Reassessment, Recovery, and Legacy* with Greg Frame.

Cyrielle Garson is Lecturer in Contemporary Anglophone Theatre at Avignon University, France, and a member of the Cultural Identity, Texts and Theatricality research team. She is also the Secretary of Radac (the French Society for the Study of Contemporary Theatre in English) and was one of the recipients of the CDE (The German Society for Contemporary Drama in English) biannual award in 2018 for her PhD dissertation on British verbatim theatre, which she is turning into a monograph for De Gruyter. Her current research explores VR theatre, minority theatre in Canada, as well as Anglophone theatre at the Avignon Festival.

Phyllis Lassner is Professor Emerita in the Crown Center for Jewish and Israel Studies at Northwestern University, USA. Her publications include *British Women Writers of World War II*, *Colonial Strangers: Women Writing the End of the British Empire*, *Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust*, and *Espionage and Exile: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Spy Fiction and Film*. She co-edited the volume *Antisemitism and Philosemitism in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, the new edition of Gisella Perl's memoir, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, and *The Palgrave Handbook of Holocaust Literature and Culture*. She was awarded the International Diamond Jubilee Fellowship

2015–17 at Southampton University, UK, for her work on Holocaust representation. Her current publications include essays on Polish post-Holocaust film, Josef Herman's art of Holocaust lamentation, Trudi Kanter's escape memoir, and boyhood in the Holocaust. She is a member of the Education and Outreach Committee of the Illinois Holocaust Museum.

Peter Lawson lectures on English literature and creative writing at the Open University, UK. He has written extensively on British-Jewish literature, in particular poetry, theatre and Holocaust narratives. His books include *Passionate Renewal: Jewish Poetry in Britain since 1945* (2001), *Anglo-Jewish Poetry from Isaac Rosenberg to Elaine Feinstein* (2006), and a collection of his own poems, *Senseless Hours* (2009). Peter is guest-editor for a special issue of *Humanities* on 'Contemporary British-Jewish Literature, 1970–2020'.

Jeanette R. Malkin is retired from the Theatre Studies Department at the Hebrew University Jerusalem, Israel. She co-edited the book *Jews and the Making of Modern German Theatre* (2010) and is the author of *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama* (1999) and *Verbal Violence in Contemporary Drama: From Handke to Shepard* (1992). Her works on ethnicity and theatre culture, postmodernism and modernist German theatre have appeared in numerous academic journals and books. Malkin served as a member of the board of the Franz Rosenzweig Research Centre for German-Jewish Literature and Cultural History at the Hebrew University Jerusalem from 1998 to 2006.

Jeremy Solomons is Lecturer in Writing, Stonehill College, MA. Previously he was Scholar in Residence at the Elie Wiesel Center for Jewish Studies at Boston University. He is researching Post–Second World War British-Jewish theatre, applied theatre and humanities.

Axel Stähler is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Kent, UK. His research interests include modern Jewish writing and intermediality. He has published on Anglophone Jewish literature, the Holocaust, and on the convergence of Zionist, racial, and colonial discourses in early twentieth-century German-Jewish literature and culture. His most recent publications include *Zionism, the German Empire, and Africa* (2019) and the award-winning *Edinburgh Companion to Modern Jewish Fiction* (2015; co-edited with David Brauner). He is a Leverhulme Research Fellow, currently working on a book project on the representation of the destruction of Jerusalem in nineteenth-century European literature, art and music.

Mark Taylor-Batty is Senior Lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Leeds, UK. He has interests in modern and contemporary British and European theatre and has published books and articles on Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, Sarah Kane and the French director Roger Blin. His most recent publication is *The Theatre of Harold Pinter* (Methuen Drama, 2015). Most recently, he has been the principle investigator on an AHRC-funded research project *Harold Pinter: Histories and Legacies*.

Sue Vice is Professor of English Literature at the University of Sheffield, UK, where she teaches contemporary literature, film, television and Holocaust studies. Her most recent publications include the monograph *Textual Deceptions: False Memoirs and Literary Hoaxes in the Contemporary Era* (2014) and the co-authored study *Barry Hines: 'Kes', 'Threads' and Beyond*, with David Forrest (2017). Her latest book, *Claude Lanzmann's 'Shoah' Outtakes: Holocaust Rescue and Resistance*, will be published in 2021.

Eckart Voigts is Professor of English Literature at TU Braunschweig, Germany. He was President of CDE (German Society for Theatre and Drama in English, 2010–16), co-editor of *JCDE* and has written, edited and co-edited numerous books and articles, such as *Janespotting and Beyond: British Heritage Retrovisions since the Mid-1990s* (2005), *Reflecting on Darwin* (2014), *Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse* (2015) and *Companion to Adaptation Studies* (2018, with Dennis Cutchins and Katja Krebs).

Mike Witcombe is Visiting Lecturer at Royal Holloway, University of London, UK. He is co-editor of the collection *New Voices in Jewish American Literature* (2018) and is co-editor of a forthcoming publication on the work of Naomi Alderman. His research focuses on gender and sexuality in contemporary Jewish literature. He has additional research interests in psychoanalysis, videogames and baseball fiction.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Federal State of Lower Saxony/VolkswagenStiftung for funding the three-year project 'Hyphenated Cultures: Contemporary British-Jewish Theatre' in the funding initiative Niedersächsisches Vorab: Research Cooperation Lower Saxony, Israel.

Many people have provided guidance and assistance in composing this *Companion*. We are grateful to all the writers, artists and theatre-makers willing to share their knowledge with us. Ido Telem provided invaluable assistance and companionship as researcher on this project. We are grateful to Leora Gal for her professional editing and preparation of the volume. We would also like to acknowledge the work of Luciana Tamas and the student assistants who have contributed in various ways to this research project, such as Antonie Huff, Ann-Catherine Sternberg and others.

We would like to thank everyone involved in the international conference on 'Contemporary British-Jewish Theatre' that took place in October 2018 at TU Braunschweig. Eckart Voigts and Jeanette R. Malkin wish to thank the organizers of the conference 'Shakespeare and the Jews' (London 2017) where they presented part of our work at an early stage. We would like to thank Nathan Abrams and Ruth Gilbert, the organizers of the 'British-Jewish Contemporary Cultures' conference at Bangor University, Wales, in March 2018, where we held a panel on 'Contemporary British-Jewish Theatre'. Eckart Voigts would like to thank the organizers of the conference 'Harold Pinter: Stages, Networks, Collaborations' at the University of Birmingham (April 2018) where he presented his paper '"Too Much of a Modern?" Pinter's Jewishness'.

Finally, we are grateful to our publishers Methuen Drama and to the series editors, Mark Taylor-Batty and Enoch Brater, for welcoming this *Companion* into their book series and offering thoughtful comments as well as to invaluable leads from our anonymous readers in their reader reports.

1

Invisible Otherness: An Introduction to British-Jewish Theatre since the 1950s

Eckart Voigts and Jeanette R. Malkin

Cultural Passing: The Jews Who Write

In the preface to *Two Thousand Years* (2006), Mike Leigh provides an important observation about his British-Jewish identity:

> Here's my Jewish play. I've been threatening to do it for years, but I haven't felt ready until now, when I'm well into my sixties. … Those of us who escaped from our Jewish background have usually spent most of our adult lives keeping quiet about our Jewishness, at least. This isn't about being ashamed of one's identity, it's rather about being perceived as something you're actually not, or being cast as a stereotype role that isn't your true self. … *Two Thousand Years* is both a Jewish play, and a play for and about everybody.
>
> (Leigh 2006: v, vii)

Leigh seems to be wary that the British perception of what it means to be a Jew will inevitably cast him in a light untrue to his self-perception. It is, after all, about 'perception': British Jews are very aware of how they are *seen* by Christian England and have long strived for invisibility. In 2003, Bryan Cheyette asked a question that in the view of Ruth Gilbert 'underpins much subsequent work in British-Jewish studies: "What is it about Britishness … – that is so *deforming*?"' (Gilbert 2013: 3; emphasis added). Britishness and Jewishness have never been fully compatible. Linda Grant surmises that 'everyone knows that the British are tactful, decorous, well-mannered, prudent, prone to meaningful silences, and Jews are – well, the opposite' (Grant 2006b: 5). Playwright Ryan Craig, interviewed in this volume, has a similar take on British Jews. 'The Jewish personality doesn't compliment the English personality,' he says. 'The English are reserved, don't really talk about

themselves too much. They don't like to brag, or push themselves forward. … The Jewish personality … rubs up against the English one' (Craig interview, in this volume, p. 241). Samantha Ellis felt her play *Cling to Me like Ivy* (2010) was reconnecting with 'Jewish storytelling. All the Jews I know are full of stories' (Ellis 2011).

Work by British-Jewish theatre artists which does not specifically include Jewish characters or themes has rarely been addressed as reflecting British-Jewish identities. The cultural transformations that have shaped contemporary British-Jewish theatre have never been researched, since neither from without nor from within were they perceived as particularly or significantly 'Jewish'. While there is research on key practitioners, movements and genres, we have identified the hyphenated identity of being British-Jewish as an often overlooked and underexplored ethnic dimension 'hidden in plain sight', a phrase borrowed from the title of Nathan Abrams' 2016 book on Jewishness in British film. Following the advice of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp, 'we take Jewishness as contingent and contextual rather than definitive and presumptive' as 'no single definition of "Jewish art" can suffice' (2008: 3). As David Bial (2005: 21) reminds us, we should distinguish between Jewishness and Judaism; Jewishness is the performance of generalized cultural codes; it is more inclusive than Judaism, which is based on religion, tradition and practice, or even *Yiddishkeit*, referencing an often idealized European past. Thus, this *Companion* for contemporary British-Jewish theatre addresses the neglected dimension of Jewishness in the work of many prominent British theatre-makers while seeking to avoid simplistic essentialism that links thematic predilections or aesthetic choices to ethnic background.

The immediate post–Second World War generation of British-Jewish theatre artists were cagey about their identity. Harold Pinter, when asked, said he considered himself a Jew who writes rather than a Jewish writer (in Billington 2007: 189), yet Jewish characters and themes can be found in his plays and are especially clear in his penultimate play, *Ashes to Ashes* (1996). Like Leigh, Pinter finally turned to address his Jewishness most directly in his later years. Tom Stoppard, another key British theatre-maker of Jewish background, wrote his first 'Jewish play', *Leopoldstadt*, in 2019, at the age of 82; it opened in the West End at Wyndham's Theatre in February 2020. Stoppard, born in Czechoslovakia, was always aware of his 'outsider' roots, but apparently only learned in 1993, at the age of 56, just how Jewish he was. Even the most outspoken Jewish playwright of this generation, Arnold Wesker, easily blended into the broader discontentment of disillusioned utopias articulated by John Osborne and the angry young men so that Sally Whyte concludes: 'Although Wesker is an open and partisan Jew, very little of

this is evident in the bulk of his work' (2003: 1149), a view that Peter Lawson redresses in this volume in his exploration of the dialectics of utopian Jewishness. In Wesker's generation, utopian socialist views were often conflated with deep messianic elements in the Judaic tradition, certainly in Eastern Europe and Russia.

South African-born Sir Ronald Harwood, best known for his screenplays for *The Dresser* (1983) and *The Pianist* (2002), is another example of the uneasy acculturation of the first generation of British-Jewish playwrights. Harwood anglicized his name from Horwitz after having been told by a teacher at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA), where he trained, that his name was too foreign and too Jewish for a British actor (Walker 2006). Harwood says simply that this decision was made to ease his career into British theatre and not as a disavowal of his Jewish origins or for fear of antisemitism (Robinson 2017). Harwood's plays and film scripts often dealt with the Nazi period, which fascinated him. Peter Shaffer, another prominent British-Jewish playwright of this generation, explored Jewish themes early in his career, long before he found international fame with his most successful plays *Equus* (1973) and *Amadeus* (1979). In *Five-Finger Exercise* (1958), Shaffer gives the young German music teacher Walter Langer both Anglophilia and an unrepentant Nazi father. His television play, *The Salt Land*, broadcast on ITV in 1955, focused on the Mayers, a German-born refugee family in Mandatory Palestine of the mid-1940s, whose two sons embody the antagonism between religious and secular Jewishness. Later, in *Shrivings* (1970), Shaffer again explores his trademark dualist antagonists by juxtaposing the sceptical, rootless Jewish-born poet Mark Askelon to the more pragmatic, self-accepting Gideon. Shaffer's successes, however, have only a tenuous thematic connection to his Jewishness. His brother Anthony, a crime writer famous for his screenplay of the movie *The Wicker Man* and his play *Sleuth*, refrained from delving into Jewishness, with the possible exception of his early play *This Savage Parade* (1963), which explored the idea of a Jewish revenge on the Nazis.

There are also British-Jewish writers of younger generations who do not engage thematically with their Jewish ancestry. These include Peter Morgan, whose father, Arthur Morgenthau, fled Germany for London in 1933. Morgan is known for his visions of Englishness (*The Queen* 2006, *The Special Relationship* 2010, *The Audience* 2013, *The Crown* 2016) and biographical speculation (*Frost/Nixon* 2006, *Bohemian Rhapsody* 2018). Stephen Poliakoff is in some ways similar to Morgan. Some of Poliakoff's thematic preoccupations, such as the discovery of clandestine histories, buried family secrets or the potential power of media documents (especially photographs and film images) to investigate an undisclosed past might speak to the

Jewish preoccupation with the past, but his plays are rarely openly Jewish-themed. Poliakoff emerged in the late 1970s as part of a new generation of left-leaning political playwrights addressing contemporary Britain during the Thatcher years, including Mike Leigh, David Hare and Howard Brenton. Poliakoff was relatively successful but drew little critical attention working at the National Theatre, with the Royal Shakespeare Company and at other prestigious writer's theatres such as the Almeida, Hampstead, Bush and Royal Court. Poliakoff began exploring his Jewishness more explicitly in his forties, such as in his 1999 play *Talk of the City*, which addresses failure of the BBC radio broadcasts to report on the full extent of Jewish persecution in Nazi Germany before the Second World War. As with Harwood, Poliakoff's acute awareness of continental European history allows him to transcend the British perspective on Europe, more particularly into Russia and Germany. Robin Nelson remarked in his study of Poliakoff's plays: 'As the descendant of Russian émigré Jews, Poliakoff is conscious of the need to be watchful lest Europe's latent totalitarian tendencies in the first half of the twentieth century erupt again' (Nelson 2011: 8).

Peter Brook and Jonathan Miller have also preferred not to stress their Jewish roots. Brook has always refused to discuss his Jewish background or its meaning for him. An ideological internationalist and a disciple of the Greek-Armenian mystic and philosopher George Gurdjieff, Brook found ethnic particularism meaningless to himself. Medical doctor, theatre actor and director Jonathan Miller, in contrast, came from a large Lithuanian Jewish family and struggled to play down his Jewishness. Miller's character in *Beyond the Fringe* once announced, 'I'm not really a Jew, you know, just Jew-*ish*,' a painful witticism that Miller often repeated in interviews (Bassett 2012: 31). Miller's biographer Kate Bassett notes that Judaism was an important part of his background, as was his wariness of antisemitism (Bassett 2012: 32). Miller admitted in an interview with Dick Cavett in 1980 that had he lived in New York, where there are many open and proud Jewish intellectuals, he too might have been more open about being a Jew. Most of these Jewish theatre people were acculturated in London but some came from Manchester, Liverpool or Leeds, such as Miller, Poliakoff, Leigh, Hytner, Morgan and Anthony and Peter Shaffer, where there were – and still are – large Jewish communities.

Yet among those first-generation British-Jewish playwrights there were also those who wrote often about their Jewish world, such as Bernard Kops and Steven Berkoff. Berkoff has had a long and varied career in theatre and film and has written and staged numerous plays. Like Wesker, both Berkoff and Kops were and remain (both are alive and active as of this writing) open about their Jewish roots. They remain ever suspicious of antisemitism

and, resisting assimilationist forces, have often articulated their East End Jewishness. As the other examples above make clear, most British-Jewish artists have been conditioned for decades by social pressure towards cultural passing, learning to keep a low profile and not to highlight their ethnic or religious identity. Identity, however, sometimes finds more discrete markers. In her book *Transferring to America: Jewish Interpretations of American Dreams*, Rael Meyerowitz contends that in some Jewish-cultured artists and critics, 'a certain Jewishness … provides a discernible subtext for all their work, that comes to the surface at significant moments, and that, whether latent or manifest, is fundamental to the desires and anxieties that they deal with and express' (1995: 3). These subtexts and anxieties must be decoded and opened for interpretation, as they are in the chapters of this book.

We may, therefore, distinguish two phases of British-Jewish theatre in England: a first phase when British-Jewish theatre was often (but not always) passing and often (but not always) a medium for transferring European culture. In this phase, British-Jewish theatre is often noted for its connection to European theatre innovations, transported by émigré directors and writers or playwrights predominantly from European-Ashkenazi families, such as Peter Brook, Tom Stoppard, Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker, Steven Berkoff, Bernard Kops and others. While their Jewish identities may have been well known in theatre circles, their Jewishness has never been a subject of public debate. If there was otherness in most Jewish theatre writing, it was largely invisible. The second phase, in which British-Jewish theatre artists began to bring their identity more clearly to the emerging multi-ethnic metropolitan mix, began with the new wave of the 1990s, but was most clearly articulated after the turn of the millennium, as one new voice among the 'flowering of various sensibilities, a whole new variety of voices' (Sierz 2011: 26).

Invisible Otherness: Defining British-Jewish Theatre

The term 'British-Jewish' links a transnational ethnicity and a problematically ill-defined national dimension. Our definition of British-Jewish is seemingly straightforward: British theatre artists who also identify as belonging to the Jewish 'tribe'. But are British-Jewish artists who have not created anything recognizably Jewish in terms of characters, settings and themes still relevant to our endeavour? Ezra Mendelsohn defines Jewish art as 'work by artists of Jewish descent that not only depicts Jewish life but may also advance a Jewish agenda' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Karp 2008: 3). Yet Jewish agendas such as debates on Israel or antisemitism are rarely present before Wesker's *The Merchant* (1973, later renamed *Shylock* 1976) which fervently rewrites

the most infamous British-Jewish character with a definite agenda in mind, suggesting how antisemitism turned Shylock into Shylock. One of the rare agenda plays prior to Wesker was written by the American Charles Marowitz, who worked with Peter Brook during his 'Theatre of Cruelty' season at the Royal Shakespeare Company (1964). Marowitz, originally a New York Jew, was a major figure of the London theatre fringe scene: in 1968 he founded the important Open Space Theatre with Thelma Holt on Tottenham Court Road. There he directed a range of Shakespeare plays he had adapted, including *The Merchant of Venice*, set in pre-Israel Palestine in 1948 with Shylock the leader of a Jewish Zionist organization that targets the British administrators in Mandatory Palestine, mirroring the historical bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem by the Irgun (see Malkin and Voigts 2018). Shylock is a heroic figure in this version and, in fact, shoots the entire British hotel staff while reciting his revenge speech 'Hath a Jew not eyes?'

American émigré writers such as Marowitz and Ed Berman brought the American-Jewish avant-garde to the attention of the British theatre scene. From 1968, the Pip Simmons Theatre Group brought American-Jewish alternative theatre techniques to Britain. American writer Martin Sherman has worked in London since 1980 and Nancy Meckler has American roots. Meckler's early work was heavily influenced by Joe Chaikin and Richard Schechner.[1] Key American-Jewish playwrights from Arthur Miller and David Mamet to Tony Kushner are a staple on British stages. Clearly, Patrick Marber has been influenced by American-Jewish playwright David Mamet, while Ryan Craig is often compared to Arthur Miller. Other American-born or American-influenced Jewish playwrights in Britain include, among the new generation, Stephen Laughton and Elyse Dodgson. Activist-playwright Anders Lustgarten is of Hungarian Jewish ancestry; he was brought up in Oxford by American immigrant parents and began writing plays while teaching in St Quentin prison, California. In reverse, British-Jewish directors, playwrights and actors have been successful in the United States, chief among them are directors Sam Mendes and Stephen Frears, comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, and actors and actresses from Elizabeth Taylor and Sam Wanamaker to Daniel Day-Lewis, Helena Bonham Carter, Daniel Radcliffe and Rachel Weisz.

Matthew Baigell and Milly Heyd write of Jewish art as including 'art created by Jewish artists in which one can find some aspect of the Jewish experience, whether religious, cultural, social, or personal' (2001: xiv). Yet the case of Nicholas Wright raises the question of whether ethnic or religious boundaries are always necessary. While Wright is neither ethnically nor religiously Jewish, his play *Travelling Light* (2012) is a frequent reference point to this subject. The play is a tribute to the Eastern European Jewish

immigrants who established themselves as influential personalities in Hollywood's golden age. It premiered at the National Theatre in January 2012, directed by Nicholas Hytner and starring Antony Sher, both Jewish, and was a great success. The definition 'art created by Jewish artists in which one can find some aspect of the Jewish experience' also poses the question of why 'Jewish experience' must include Jewish content. Most of Wesker's plays don't have explicitly Jewish characters but are still part of the world of a Jewish, socialist *tikkun olam* (Hebrew, repairing the world). In this volume, theatre critic John Nathan makes the point that argumentativeness is a particularly Jewish trait, adding that 'to my mind, theatre is almost a form of Jewish expression' because, 'if argument is, as we already discussed, a particularly Jewish characteristic, then you can bring those characteristics to the stage … Because drama is about conflict'. Patrick Marber, who in interview with John Nathan in the *Jewish Chronicle* stated that he considers himself 'a Jew first and Englishman second' (Nathan 2015b), has written only one play with explicit Jewish characters, *Howard Katz*, whose theme is redemption – hardly a specifically Jewish subject of interest. Marber's other plays, such as *Dealer's Choice* (1995) or *Closer* (1997), were far more successful yet only hint at Jewish characters. An interested Jewish viewer might pick up on the 'Jewishness' of characters such as Stephen in *Dealer's Choice* or Daniel Woolf in *Closer*, but this character aspect cannot be regarded as essential for the plays. On the other hand, the rhythm of these plays, of their debates and arguments, can be seen as a Jewish undertone.

Background: Doing Jewishness

Jews in Britain are a minority disproportionately represented in the arts. As the examples above suggest, many British-Jewish writers are well integrated into the mainstream of British theatre, much more so than other minority writers. According to recent data, between 266,740 and 284,000 Jewish people live in the UK, around two-thirds of whom live in London, representing approximately 0.5 per cent of the UK population.

British Jews were expelled from Britain in 1290 after being accused of ritual murder, persecuted and rioted against; they were only officially readmitted in 1656, a mere 365 years ago. After gradual legal and cultural emancipation, British-Jewish literary writing emerged in the nineteenth century. We have thus to consider that Anglo-Jewish history 'is well researched in historiographical terms … but remains marginal to the UK's cultural memory and a minor reference point on 20th century and early 21st century discourses of religious and ethnic diversity' (Sternberg 2009: 3).

Based on the 2011 census figures, the UK has the fifth largest Jewish population in the world, and the second largest population in Europe, after France.[2] It is clear, however, that both the number of Jewish practitioners in the arts and their cultural and aesthetic impact are much larger than 0.5 per cent. And then, there is the problematic category of BAME, which stands for Black, Asian and minority ethnic. BAME has replaced the categories Black or non-white, after sociologist Tariq Modood and others criticized the fuzzy concept of 'Blackness' – a very different concept from the American-heritage-based differentiation among African American, Jewish American, Italian American and so forth. Latent antisemitism, assimilationist pressures and the fact that UK 'citizenship has not as warmly embraced the notion of the hyphenate identity as in the United States' (Abrams 2010: 59) are decidedly factors in Britain, whereas the identity of being American and Jewish does not seem to be contradictory or problematic.[3]

Coming to a substantial extent out of the transnational European-Jewish diaspora, we could address British-Jewish writers simply as experts in extraterritoriality, given that most of their families have a background of migration, or as Sicher and Winehouse write, 'as veteran diaspora globetrotters who have borne racism and entered their host cultures as migrants and outsiders' (Sicher and Weinhouse 2012: 14). Across aesthetic and generational chasms, experiences of homelessness, migration and extraterritoriality feed into the British-Jewish identity from Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard to Ryan Craig and Patrick Marber, from Deborah Levy and Diane Samuels to Julia Pascal. Jewish writers are in a clearly different situation from that experienced by people of colour where anti-Muslim or anti-Black racism is much more pronounced and which may to some extent have replaced traditional antisemitic sentiments (Reitz 1998: 25–6). Julia Pascal refers to the special multicultural position of Jews in Britain: 'In Britain, there is a culture of multiculturalism, which does not include Jews. 'Cause Jews are considered white, privileged and rich. It's never said, because the British won't say it, but that's the subtext' (Pascal quoted in Behlau and Reitz 2004: 301). While many British Jews have indeed reached social prominence and are often highly visible members of the scene in arts, commerce and politics, in terms of numbers most of the British Jews are Haredi, a sect of ultra-orthodox fundamentalists which has increased both in number and in its cultural impact over the last decades. These communities traditionally have large families and often little income and have only recently begun to become culturally visible, largely through Netflix series such as *Shtisel* (Israel 2013–16) and *Unorthodox* (Germany 2020). Carol Gerson argues that British-Jewish writers write 'from a colony within a colony, looking backward to continental Europe, forward to Israel, and sideways at the United States, the current homeland of English-language Jewish culture' (Gerson 1982: 104).[4]

Yet Anglo Jewry is far from homogeneous. Claudia Sternberg warns that '[a]nother potential fallacy is to speak of the Jews in Britain without qualification, glossing over significant intra-communal differences based on migratory backgrounds (Sephardi or Ashkenazi, Western, Eastern or non-European, historical or recent), orthodox, progressive and secular lifestyles, degree of assimilation, class and ultimately the social status and recognition afforded by all of these' (Sternberg 2009: 3). While the eastern European or middle European Ashkenazi diaspora prevails in the family backgrounds of most British-Jewish theatre-makers discussed so far, there are also British-Jewish theatre-makers of Sephardic and Mizrahi descent such as Samantha Ellis, Shelley Silas and Laughton. In general, migratory backgrounds are varied. Some still have family in mainland Europe or Israel, and many have family ties to South Africa (Antony Sher, Ronald Harwood, Gail Louw, Gillian Slovo), India (Shelley Silas) or Australia (Miriam Margolyes). All of the playwrights we encountered are secular so that we can conclude that the British-Jewish theatre identity is not predominantly religious. True, many of our interviewees described religious practices in their parents' homes and many continue some of these traditions, but invariably they relegate religion to the almost subconscious background of a non-believing urban intelligentsia. Most would agree with Peter Brook, who reported about his father: 'Jewishness to him had to do with religion and rabbis, and he was a modern assimilated Englishman' (Croyden 2009: 295). Brook echoes the stance taken by Harwood and others about a smooth transitioning between the poles of the hyphenated British-Jewish identity: 'In the milieu in which we lived, there was never, at any point in my life, any friction' (Croyden 2009: 296). In his autobiography, Brook recalls that 'I had learned as a child that I was Jewish and Russian, but these words were abstract concepts to me; my impressions were deeply conditioned by England: a house was an English house, a tree was an English tree, a river was an English river' (Brook [1998] 2007). It is worth noting that Brook's wife, Natasha Parry, was also Jewish and far more assertive on the subject. Similarly, Jonathan Miller described his own Jewishness as prophylactic in keeping him away from Christianity; his son remembers 'an amphibious relationship with his Jewish origins …, half in and half out of Jewish water' (Bassett 2012: 33).

David Herman has argued that European locations, biographical vagaries, disguises and unrest as themes in Tom Stoppard's work can be related to an implicitly Jewish experience (Herman 2015: 193) that has finally come to the fore in *Leopoldstadt*. Similarly, Linda Grant found Jewish themes in Mike Leigh's work that can be traced to his Jewishness even before *Two Thousand Years*, such as the focus on families and sibling rivalry, thwarted idealism, diaspora and tragicomedy in the work of 'this most English of playwrights

and film-makers' (Grant 2006a). Peter Brook has articulated that unrest is the key to identify Jewishness with a theatre identity. In fact, Brook himself is the global theatre-maker who in transitioning from London to Paris via Africa most effortlessly transcends the narrow confines of an insular British or English theatre. We can, thus, argue that Jewishness is one element of otherness that is key in making contemporary British theatre polyglot and cosmopolitan. In the attempt to unify universalism and cultural differences, Kwame Anthony Appiah stresses the mobility of cultural practices and objects. In *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006: 4) Appiah highlights the ethical obligations among human beings, praising 'the recognition that human beings are different and that we can learn from each other's differences'. Furthermore, Judith Butler has made otherness and alterity key terms in her refutation of the tendency to equate Jewishness and Zionism: 'the distinctive trait of Jewish identity is that it is interrupted by alterity' (Butler 2012: 6). In the Butlerian sense one cannot *be* Jewish, but one can *do* Jewishness.

Theatre critics John Nathan (2015a), David Jays (2000) and Michael Billington (2012) have argued that Jewish identities bring an outsider's identity and outside (often European) perspectives to British theatre. Billington, in a journalistic essay, wondered 'how much an inherited sense of exile, loss and isolation offers a key to [British-Jewish dramatist's] work. Is there, in fact, such a thing as a Jewish theatrical identity?' (2012). Billington here taps into a much-contested debate – from the universalist claim of Harold Bloom that Jewishness is a 'paradigm for humanity' to George Steiner on the insistence of the singularity of the religious and racial past and the Jews' experience of extraterritoriality (see Brauner 2001: 2). With some trepidation, Bryan Cheyette has remarked on 'the protean instability of "the Jew"' as a 'tenacious signifier' (1993: 8), and David Brauner concluded by bringing the dualisms together: 'For some … Jewishness is an innate, inalienable property, for others a learned tradition; for some, a belief system, for others a cultural construct; for some a race, for others a religion; for some a nationality, for others a sensibility; for some a historical legacy, for others a metaphysical state' (Brauner 2001: 3).

Jewish culture, then, is the prototypical example of a transnational imagined community – a rather fluid 'ethnoscape' in the words of Arjun Appadurai (2003: 25). Thus, theoretical keywords for the discussion of British-Jewish theatre come from inter- and trans-culturalism (Knowles 2010; Pavis 1996), ideas of cultural transformation and adaptation, as well as intersectionality – the study of interrelations in cultural discrimination (Gilman 2001; Ginsberg 1996). How, then, is British-Jewish theatre continuously reimagined from within and without and how can there be a sense of shared trajectories within the group of Jewish writers currently active?

'Central but Unidentified': Existing Research

In 2013 Axel Stähler claimed that '[d]rama has remained a conspicuous absence in the critical engagement with Jewish cultural production in Britain' (Stähler 2013: 320), and David Jays suggested the urgency of our project: 'Jewish theatre artists have been central but often unidentified' (Jays 2019). The blatant gap in research on British-Jewish theatre is surprising, considering British theatre critic Michael Billington's claim in 2012 of 'modern theatre's heavy dependence on Jewish writers'. How do we account for this paucity of research into British-Jewish theatre-making? Playwright and director Julia Pascal believes that British-Jewish artists' reluctance to openly examine their Jewish heritage is due to still prevalent stereotypes and exposure to 'constant low-level anti-Semitism that filters through British Society' (in Quinn 2009). In her opinion, this prejudice is also reflected in the subsidization of ethnic minorities by the Arts Council, from which Jewish minorities have received little support. In her Ph.D. thesis, Pascal (2016) bemoans the scarcity of Jewish stage characters who are invariably reduced to a set of stereotypes rooted in English literature, such as Shylock, Barabas and Fagin. Pascal also notes British theatre's almost complete omission of Jewish women, with the possible exception of Anne Frank (Pascal 2016: 64). She maintains that when Jewish women are portrayed at all, they tend to be redeemed by conversion to Christianity (Pascal 2016: 33). Pascal's examples are Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* from 1605 and Eva in Diane Samuels' 1993 play *Kindertransport*.

There are various studies of national hyphenated identities: German-Jewish theatre artists and culture have been well researched (most recently by Malkin and Rokem 2010), as have American-Jewish theatrical relations (Alexander 2001; Bial 2005; Novick 2008). In the field of British-Jewish theatre, however, there are only very few dissertations and monographs. Notable work is focused on the role of memory in British-Jewish drama since 1945 (Behlau-Dengler 2011; Lassner 2014) and includes Julia Pascal's account of the lack of representation of Jewish women on the British stage since 1945 (Pascal 2016). We have also found some scattered studies of individual dramatists or sections on dramatists in studies and anthologies devoted more generally to Jewish cultural life in Britain (Behlau and Reitz 2004; Cesarani 1990; Cheyette 1998; Lawson 2011; Neumeier 1998; Sicher 1985; Valman 2014) or Jewish theatre more generally (Nahshon 2009; Rozik 2013). In terms of individual dramatists, the focus is very much on the first wave of male British post-war dramatists, and while the burgeoning literature on Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard is hard to fathom, rarely do studies discuss their Jewishness. There is a stream of studies on Arnold

Wesker, Peter Shaffer (Gianakaris 1992) and a few notable biographical studies on Bernard Kops (Baker and Shumaker 2014), Ronald Harwood (Robinson 2017), Steven Berkoff (Cross 2004), Stephen Poliakoff (Nelson 2011) and Peter Barnes (Dukore 1981). Significant actor-writers such as Steven Berkoff (1993, 1996, 2000, 2020) or Antony Sher (2001, 2004, 2005, 2018) have left a flourishing trail of autobiographical texts, diaries and memoirs.

There are also some studies of British-Jewish directors' work at key theatre venues, their methods and institutional anchoring. Peter Brook, whose approach in *The Empty Space* was revelatory and revolutionary for the theatre and practice of world theatre in 1968, and, to a somewhat lesser degree, Jonathan Miller have been discussed at great length (Bassett 2012; Brook 1998; Croyden 2009; Kustow 2006; Romain 1992). Jonathan Miller's polymath interests, which took him from student comedy and a medical degree to the artistic directorship at the Old Vic and beyond to television, film and opera, mirror Brook's polyglot engagement with the world. Other significant theatre-makers are Mike Alfreds, who founded the influential ensemble Shared Experience in 1975, and David Aukin. The generation of powerful Jewish directors of the 1990s is discussed in (auto)biographical texts: Nicholas Hytner at the National Theatre and the Bridge Theatre (*Balancing Acts*, 2017), David Lan at the Young Vic (*As If by Chance*, 2020), Dominic Cooke at the Royal Court and the National Theatre, and Sam Mendes at the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Donmar Warehouse (Leipacher 2011; Wolf 2004) have also left their indelible mark on the history of British theatre. Mendes' epic *The Lehman Trilogy* (National Theatre, adapted by Ben Power from Stefano Massini's original play), on the failures of capitalism, was a high-profile success in 2018.

Thus, while the Man Booker Prize win of Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* (2010) may have provided impetus for studies of British-Jewish novelists such as Jacobson, Clive Sinclair, Anita Brookner, Stephen Fry, Jenny Diski or Will Self, and while we have seen first approaches to British-Jewish poetry (Lawson 2006), TV productions (cf. Abrams 2010) and popular culture (Abrams 2016), studies of British-Jewish theatre to this date remain partial and rare.

The differing positions on the current situation of Jewish people in Britain are marked by conflicting statements in the interviews we conducted as part of our research project, some of which are appendixed to this volume. The former head of the National Theatre, Nicholas Hytner, while admitting that antisemitism has been on the rise recently, told us that anti-Jewish sentiments have only played a minor role in his career:

> Speaking as a sixty-year-old gay man, no comparison. It was agony in the sixties and the seventies – to grow up then and try to come to terms with being gay. That was awful, to get to the other side of it. Being Jewish? It didn't matter. Really, truly. Being gay was tough; being Jewish was not tough. That's my experience.
>
> (Hytner interview in this volume, p. 219)

Hytner's statement brings up the question of intersectionality: how does being a woman, or being gay or lesbian, or being Black, or coming from Kolkata, shape writers' identities in addition to being Jewish? Julia Pascal's view on how anti-Jewish sentiments have shaped arts and theatre policies in Britain articulates a probable shift in the perception of antisemitism:

> The Left, who run the arts and the theatre, is profoundly anti-Israel, therefore anything a writer produces or anything that is said in public, ... or whether support is given or not given to BDS,[5] affects whether work is commissioned. Many British Jews are frightened. To be a Jew in England has always been, and is, a state of low-level anxiety. ... Being a Jew does not place a person in a fashionable minority. ... If you go to the Arts Council to put on a play that touches Jewish history in any complex way, you're very unlikely to get support because Jews are perceived to be rich and can look after themselves.
>
> (Pascal in this volume, p. 223)

New Jewish Plays for the Twenty-First Century

The recent generation of playwrights has seemingly moved away from the acculturated, assimilated stance of their forefathers and is tackling contemporary identity issues more directly. As ethnic diversification increases in the urban theatre centres, Jewish theatre-makers have ceased to be amalgamated into a mainstream yet are increasingly challenged to demarcate their identities. That is, British-Jewish theatre artists today will largely be positioned (and position themselves) as expressing a hyphenated British-Jewish identity, rather than merely the work of 'Jews who happen to write', to quote Harold Pinter's disavowal of Jewishness in his writing. The current British-Jewish play is smaller in scale and frequently seeks to define Jewishness as one ethnic node within the network of diverse ethnic theatres in contemporary urban Britain (and this frequently still means London), as well as a more diverse perspective on gender identities. It is carried by theatre spaces that more directly engage with their immediate communities

and are thus embedded in London's ethnic mix, which is composed of a more diversified scene of outsiders compared to the East End of the 1950s. Jewish actress and playwright Tracy Ann Oberman has commented on the practice of anglicizing names as assimilationist when doing so was suggested to her: 'I think the British Jewish voice is there but we've been ashamed of it and kept it under wraps' (in Jays 2019).

Donald Weber recounts how Mike Leigh was inspired by Kwame Kwei-Armah's *Elmira's Kitchen* in 2003 to write *Two-Thousand Years* as a Jewish 'ethnic equivalent' (Leigh in Weber 2016: 162). Maybe following the example of other multicultural cosmopolitan London writers, the twenty-first century has seen 'a rising generation of British Jewish theatre artists' who are less reticent about their Jewishness, 'getting mouthy, raising their Jewish voices unabashedly, in the process overturning the tradition of "Stay shtumm."' (Weber 2016: 159, 161). We argue that this process began even before the millennium. Prominent writers active in the first phase of this new chapter of British-Jewish writing in the 1990s include Shelley Silas, whose family descended from Sephardi Jews of Kolkata and Palestine, Diane Samuels, Julia Pascal, Ryan Craig and, above all, Patrick Marber. This coincides with an awareness of more localized British-Jewish theatres, many of them fringe venues in north and north-east London, catering to their respective liberal Jewish communities, such as the Hampstead Theatre under David Aukin, Jenny Topper and Edward Hall, Shared Experience under Mike Alfreds and Nancy Meckler et al., the Park Theatre under Jez Bond, the Tricycle/Kiln Theatre, the Arcola Theatre in Dalston, further north the Watford Palace Theatre, further west the Finborough Theatre, West Brompton and, since 2013, the Jewish cultural centre JW3 in West Hampstead. While we may thus tie British-Jewish theatre to distinct Jewish-inflected audiences, the influence of Jewish artistic directors reaches far beyond any ethnically homogeneous community. Critic John Nathan holds – with some justification – that the success of British theatre in the 2000s is linked to three significant Jewish directors: Nicholas Hytner at the National Theatre, Dominic Cooke at the Royal Court and David Lan at the Young Vic (Nathan 2015a).

While not focused on specifically Jewish themes, the success of Patrick Marber's multi-award winning *Closer* (1997), adapted by him for the high-profile film production in 2004, directed by Mike Nichols (an American Jew) and starring Julia Roberts, Natalie Portman, Clive Owen and Jude Law, may have given twenty-first-century Jewish writers an impetus to more directly address their situation in contemporary Britain. Representative examples of contemporary urban plays for metropolitan (and, in part) Jewish communities in the twenty-first century might include Samantha Ellis' *Cling to Me like Ivy*, Shelley Silas' *Calcutta Kosher*, Alexis Zegerman's *Holy Sh!t*,

Josh Azouz' *The Mikvah Project* and *Buggy Baby*, Daniel Kanaber's *Shiver*, or Stephen Laughton's *One Jewish Boy.*

Alexis Zegerman is one representative of the new generation of British-Jewish theatre artists. She started her career as an actress and is best known for her role as Zoe in Mike Leigh's Oscar-nominated comedy-drama film *Happy-Go-Lucky* (2008), for which she won a British Independent Film Award for Best Supporting Actress and a London Film Critics Award. She also played the part of Daliah Sofer in Leigh's *Storm* (2009) and in his stage play *Two Thousand Years* (2005) as well as Eva in Stoppard's *Leopoldstadt* (2020). *Holy Sh!t* opened the new Kiln Theatre (formerly the Tricycle Theatre) in 2018. Here, Zegerman explores religious and cultural issues among two middle-class couples in London, the secular Jews, journalist Simone and designer Sam Kellerman, and their Anglican best friends, Black teacher Nick and white marketing manager Juliet Obasi. The conundrum is whether to send their kids to a Catholic school, St. Mary's, considered the best school in the area. The fight for the place prompts a foul-mouthed descent of the Jewish couple into racism and of the Black and white couple into antisemitism, suggesting a dark layer of festering prejudice under a thin veneer of middle-class multiculturalism.

The success of novels such as Eve Harris' *The Marrying of Chani Kaufman* (2013) and Naomi Alderman's exploration of a lesbian relationship among Orthodox London Jews, *Disobedience* (2006, turned into a film in 2017), have led to the Haredi communities of north London becoming a theme in contemporary British-Jewish theatre. Daniel Kanaber's *Shiver* (Palace, Watford, 2014) engages (like Steven Berkoff's *Sit and Shiver* in 2004) with Jewish mourning rites in a play focused on how protagonist Mordecai should react to the loss of his wife Sadie and how to prepare for the shivah, the seven-day period of Jewish mourning. Stewart Permutt's *A Dark Night in Dalston* (Park Theatre, London, 2017) juxtaposes Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) and secular Jews, when a young Orthodox Jewish man ends up spending Friday night with a local woman because the onset of darkness prohibits him from travelling. Gail Louw's more recent and as yet unpublished two-hander *Eishes Chayill – Woman of Valour* explores the sexual mores in the Haredi community. Here, an Orthodox housewife, Chasida, must come to terms with her husband's decision to have sex with men during her 'unclean' days (*niddah*), which results in his HIV infection. Samantha Ellis' *Cling to Me like Ivy* (2010) is one of the few plays to fully explore the world of Hasidic Jewry in contemporary London. Rivka, the 21-year-old daughter of an Orthodox rabbi, escapes from an arranged marriage to David, the son of another rabbi. While this engagement remains non-sexual, discussions of Rivka's hair and, in particular her *sheitel* (wig),[6] are a metaphor for Rivka's growing exploration of sexuality through her affair with the secular, English

Patrick. Patrick is the boyfriend of her best friend Leela, who is Hindu. Ellis has explained that her play was provoked by 'Sheitel-gate' in 2004: Hindu hair used in the making of wigs for Hasidic Jewish women. In *Cling to Me like Ivy* (2010), Ellis explores the multi-ethnic, multireligious world of contemporary London.

The London-based writer and director Josh Azouz (b. 1985) also represents this younger generation of British-Jewish theatre artists in prototypical ways, and his work is equally steeped in Jewish signifiers. Emerging from writers' groups at the Royal Court and the Bush Theatre, Azouz became an associate artist for the Yard and MUJU (Muslim-Jewish Theatre Company), where he deliberately sought to cooperate with Muslim Londoners in the comedy sketch show *Come In. Sit Down!* (Tricycle Theatre, co-directed with Salman Siddiqui) in 2015. Referring to this project, Azouz said: 'I'm in my 20s, I live in London, and I don't have a Muslim friend. The problem is that if you don't know people from other communities, you make assumptions' ('Shalom, salaam and goodnight!' 2015). Both of his full-length plays are set in a contemporary multicultural London. *Buggy Baby*'s (2018) central refugee couple are fighting drug-induced horror visions of bazooka-toting rabbits triggered by the harrowing experience of raising a child after traumatic expatriation. *The Mikvah Project* (2015), revived but cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic at Orange Tree Theatre in 2020, is a Brechtian play ostentatiously set in a specifically Jewish site, the eponymous cleansing bath. As in British-Jewish playwright Nick Cassenbaum's most popular *Bubble Schmeisis* (2014), Azouz engages with the forgotten Jewish bath culture in London. Here, middle-aged Jewish Avi and the seventeen-year-old boy Eitan explore a potentially tragic homosexual affair within a community riddled by ambivalence and described as 'Postmodern Orthodox!' (Azouz 2018: 77). Both plays enjoyed extended sold-out runs at the Yard Theatre in East London and are typical of the Yard which itself was rejuvenated from a derelict warehouse in Hackney Wick, where the first wave of east London British-Jewish theatre artists emerged sixty-five years earlier. With artistic director Jay Miller's programming of both Josh Azouz and, more recently, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (2019), it seems that contemporary British-Jewish theatre has come full circle. It is now ready to usher in a new, more ethnically aware and maybe both more self-consciously and self-confidently Jewish phase of contemporary British-Jewish theatre. Azouz' work is refreshing because it is a variation on the template that has dominated British-Jewish theatre-making for a long time: formally uninventive well-made plays that feature conversations on Jewish themes at the dinner tables of middle-class families.

Stephen Laughton's play *Run*, which opened at the Vaults Festival in 2016 and went on to tour the UK until April 2017 to much critical acclaim, also addresses gay Jewishness and is exemplary of new British-Jewish theatre's interest in complexified intersectional identity. The brouhaha around Laughton's significant play *One Jewish Boy*, which premiered in December 2018 at the Old Red Lion Theatre in Islington, London, and transferred to the Trafalgar Studios in March 2020, is indicative of the increasingly contested and precarious, but at the same time more openly Jewish position of British-Jewish theatre artists as well as the persistent conflation of the Palestine-Israel conflict and the situation of Jews in contemporary Britain. *One Jewish Boy* is a two-hander that follows the relationship and marriage of Alex, a mixed-race woman from Peckham (she refers to herself as a 'Jamaican-Irish Catholic Windrush girl from a council estate', Laughton 2020), and Jesse, a middle-class Jewish man from Highgate. What sets *One Jewish Boy* off from previous discussions of cultural strife in multicultural urban centres is the directness of Jesse's confrontation with contemporary antisemitism in Britain and Europe. The play's title obviously references Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* (2009), which caused a major upheaval and a strong reaction in British-Jewish communities. As Mike Witcombe argues in this *Companion*, the play takes issue with precisely the conflation of diaspora Jewish identity with conflicts in contemporary Israel so that its protagonist, the British Jew Jesse, argues in vain that he has 'very little … in fact nothing to do with Israeli foreign policy' (Laughton [2018] 2020). The play's resolution, which has Jesse concluding that Israel might now be seen as a safe haven for European Jews confronted with the threat of antisemitic violence, directly invokes current discourses precipitated by events in Paris, Halle or New York.[7] Yet recent data shows that the number of Israeli-born Jews in Britain is actually rising ('New figures' 2019).

Introducing the *Companion*

This *Companion* focuses on Jewish theatre in English, a non-Jewish language. Theatre in Jewish languages – Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish and Ladino – did and continue to exist. In Europe, Yiddish theatre has declined as a consequence of the Shoah and assimilationist pressure, although Yiddish theatre has a rich tradition in Britain and particularly London before the Second World War. The *Companion* excludes significant writers active before the Second World War, such as Israel Zangwill. The structure of our *Companion* reflects the historical development of British-Jewish theatre after the Second World