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Glorious, Accursed Europe

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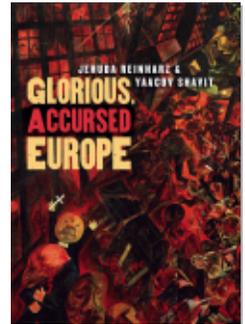
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MANIFOLD EUROPE

Germany—Thought; England—Action; France—Pleasure.

MORRIS WINCHEVSKY,
“A Letter from the Diaspora”¹

Winchevsky’s words echo a widespread motif in European culture: the categorization of Europe’s various cultures according to seemingly inherent fundamental traits that determined their unique identities and differentiated among them. One of many examples is the variety of stereotypes that Goethe articulated in his conversations with Eckermann in September 1829. Goethe described the Germans as a people concerned with great ideas and profound philosophical questions, while the English possessed a highly practical intellect and were actively engaged in conquering the world.² Nietzsche also devoted more than a few aphorisms to typical German, French, and English traits, particularly in the chapter “Peoples and Fatherlands” in *Beyond Good and Evil*. For example, he wrote: “The German soul is above all manifold, of diverse origins, more put together and superimposed than actually built.” Indeed, while industrial England’s model seemed fit for admiration and emulation in the eyes of nineteenth-century German liberals, *Volkists* regarded England as a provincial nation of merchants, lacking in depth and soul.³

During the nineteenth century, the concept of race was frequently used not only to define ethnic groups and the source of their characteristic traits, but also to define various nations within Europe. Each nation or group of nations was associated with a repertoire of stereotypes meant to denote its individuality and distinctiveness. It was possible to disagree with the validity of these stereotypes—Ahad Haam, for example, described the use of generalizations in characterizing Jews as part of the “European consensus” that created accepted perceptions⁴—but, as we have seen in chapter 4, it was difficult not to employ them.⁵ Modern European Jews sometimes spoke of Europe (and European civilization) in general terms, but at the same time, they knew that Europe was not cut from a single cloth.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche wrote about a general European spirit characterized by boundless curiosity and declared that in Europe there existed a continual movement interweaving the various races and prompting a process of assimilation, even with respect to physiology. He added: “We have found that in all major moral judgments Europe is now of one mind, including even the countries dominated by the influence of Europe.”⁶ Here Nietzsche was ignoring the age of patriotism and nationalism that emphasized particularistic basic traits, whether real or imagined. Thus, as we have seen, he perceived the German soul as being essentially different from the souls of other European nations. He described it as characterized by a tendency to metaphysical rumination and intense spirituality—an intensity absent among the English, who were mediocre and plebian. Nietzsche considered France a nation exceptional in its noble spiritual culture and traditionalism. In 1815, Christian Friedrich Rühs described the French as a “repellent, withering race.”⁷ Heine differentiated between the narrow English view of liberty and the broader French perception, which dealt with liberty for all humanity.⁸ According to Heine, the French were a social people, while the Englishman’s home was his castle; and the Germans were a “speculative nation dreaming of the past and of the future, but not existing in the present.”⁹ The characters in Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* offer a distinction between the Italian Renaissance (*renascimento*) and the German revival (*Bildungserneuerung*, literally “renewal”): the latter was the German ability to shake off the shackles of a civilization that had lost its vitality. The “young and forward-looking” German spirit was represented by individual and national adolescence; this was a “metaphysical endowment”¹⁰ unique to the Germans.¹¹ The Russian Slavophiles, as noted, believed that there was an absolute antinomy between the Russian soul and the European soul, represented primarily by France. In French nature and Western nature in general, Dostoevsky wrote, there was no place for human comradeship; instead “what shows up is a principle of individuality, a principle of isolation, of urgent self-preservation, self-interest.”¹²

IMAGE, MODEL, AND INFLUENCE

The repertoire of traits and characteristics, of which we have presented only a tiny sample, made its way into Jewish literature. Here is just one example of the writings of the radical Revisionist Jewish thinker Aba Achimeir, who made the following general (and unfounded) observations about the different characteristics of various European nations:

This columnist's generation was educated at the knees of Russian or Ashkenazi [German] culture, and more's the pity. What Russian culture and Ashkenazi culture have in common is that both are the creations of a nation unconcerned with national survival. Russian culture is, at heart, a philanthropic culture. Ashkenazi culture is a culture of individualism, concerned with the individual's worries and joys. Since both peoples feel secure with respect to nationalism, the creators of Russian and Ashkenazi culture did not worry about maintaining a national identity. But if we have absorbed the Russian cosmopolitanism and the Ashkenazi self-centeredness, these are but fatal drugs to us. It is unfortunate, very unfortunate, that our generation has hardly absorbed the Polish culture of the nineteenth century. That is a culture not of humanity, not of the individual, but of the nation. Goethe, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy have poisoned us—the sons of a nation fighting for its national existence. The great writers and poets of Polish literature would be a healing draught to us, and infuse our very bones.¹³

Images and topoi illustrate how one culture perceives and constructs others, and also how a culture sees itself—or its converse—within another culture. The imagined other culture becomes a model for imitation, a source of inspiration, or a rejected model. These images and topoi are constructed by means of knowledge that takes different forms. During the nineteenth century and part of the twentieth, they were created and disseminated primarily by means of the written word—through literature and the press. The East European Jewish intelligentsia, among others, constructed its image of France and French culture and of England and English culture from such information, which reached it by various means. In any event, we should not ascribe undue power to imagery, although it is an important part of any worldview and although it sometimes serves as a mirror to the observing culture. In many cases, a negative image is born as a means of self-defense against external influence, and this attests to the existence of such an influence more than it attests to success in withstanding it.

The Jews' knowledge and imagery of various European nations dealt with four primary subjects: the soul—that is, the traits attributed to the national character, or the collective mentality and collective national temperament; patterns of government and political culture; spiritual culture—that is, literary and artistic thought and creation; and civilization—namely, material culture, primarily science and technology.

The Russian¹⁴ and German cultures were the two European cultures that, during various periods, influenced modern Jews more than any others. So significant was their influence that it prompted the idea that the Jews had also absorbed and internalized the mentality of the Russian and German peoples. We have chosen here to discuss how France and England were imagined, as well as their cultural influence—not on English or French Jews, but on the Jews of Eastern Europe and on Hebrew society and culture in Palestine. One historian characterized France as a secondary model for the East European Jewish intelligentsia. This is also true, albeit to a lesser extent, with respect to England.¹⁵ Both nations exerted influence by means of thought, literature, and eventually the cinema. Closer acquaintance sometimes altered preconceived images; Chaim Weizmann wrote in February 1905 that “to tell the truth, we had a distorted conception of England and the English,”¹⁶ but acquaintance had changed that conception and created new images. Thus, Weizmann wrote that the English were never in a rush, and had been left behind as a result; and that a dullness of thought in all areas was widespread in England. Only after he became more closely acquainted with England did his opinion about the country and its people evolve.

A few things remain to be said about the concept of influence. One culture’s influence upon another may be realized in several ways. It is always dynamic and multilayered; it may be clear or indirect. Influence takes hold in the world of ideas and in the collective habitus. For our purposes here, it suffices to stress that the circumstances under which British culture influenced European Jews differed from the circumstances of its influence on Jews in Palestine, where the latter had a far greater degree of direct contact with the various aspects of that culture.

THE FRENCH SPIRIT AND THE FRENCH MODEL

France’s central status in Europe during the nineteenth century aroused a good deal of interest among Jews, and a desire to learn more about it. As if by magic, Paris, the capital and heart of European culture, attracted intellectuals who lived far away and had only heard of its marvels. Jewish literature and the Jewish press attempted to satisfy the desire for knowledge about France. The newspaper *Hamagid*, for instance, published many articles about Paris—for instance, on the 1900 World’s Fair in the city, the construction of the Eiffel Tower, and other events that took place in Paris or in France in general. One example of the type of information avail-

able to Jewish readers in Eastern Europe is a booklet published in 1814 in Lvov by the rabbi and scholar Shlomo Yehuda Leib Rapoport, titled *Characteristics of Paris, Including a Description of the City (and of the Island Elba)*. Relying on various sources, Rapoport sketched a portrait of the city and the character of its inhabitants. Paris, he asserted, was “the gayest and most elegant city on our entire planet.” Another example is a book on Paris by Benyamin Mandelstam. According to Mandelstam, Paris was “the city of cities! All the races and tongues of the world, every exertion of hand and mind.” He described its wonders and its darkness:

I found that Paris, and all its delights, could benefit only those inhabitants who were born there, who have, since birth, been as accustomed to high pleasure as they are to their daily bread, and cannot slake their thirst for new sights. But as for all those who come there from afar, the city drives them away from human morality, for everything there is new to them, and their eyes gaze on without being sated, and they devour every pleasure and every delight . . . and Paris devours their every travail.¹⁷

The protagonist of a novel by Peretz Smolenskin has a rather different opinion of Paris: he prefers London. Upon arriving in Paris, he writes to his sister:

Unlike London, all industry and work, this city is ready to burst. Here the tumult of life drowns out the tumult of work and labor in the great streets . . . but my heart does not crave it; I can't endure the clamoring commotion in the streets, and this nation does not capture my heart. The inhabitants here are as unlike the British as the sky is to land. The British man is like a bull straining at his yoke, performing his work gladly.

The French, Smolenskin's protagonist continues, are temperamental and fly rapidly through different moods, while the British are more restrained, yet loyal.¹⁸

In Jewish literature of the time, French culture—“the French spirit”¹⁹—represented freedom, permissiveness, and decadence. It was perceived in this way not only by the Orthodox but also by the Jewish intelligentsia in Germany and Eastern Europe. The French tongue, wrote Rabbi Jacob Emden, directly steered its students to “dissipation and obscene language” and at the very least to demonstrations of degeneracy—these being, “as everyone knows . . . the fruit and history of that language.”²⁰ When Samuel

David Luzzatto (known by the acronym Shadal) wished to point out representatives of the empty culture of entertainment in his poem “Derech Eretz or Atheism,” he chose several French authors, including Jules Janin, Charles Paul de Kock, and Honoré de Balzac. Germany symbolized decency, while France symbolized untraditional society. In *The Generation of Upheaval*, Shimon Bernfeld described the French intellectual world as beautiful and rich in charm, yet simultaneously clownish, superficial, and devoid of morals and values; it aimed to return man “to his bestial state.”²¹ This negative attitude is also expressed in Smolenskin’s novel, mentioned above, which is set around the time of the Franco-Prussian War. The protagonist writes to his sister that the Jews hang their hopes on France and curse Prussia, which they consider arrogant. But they can expect nothing from France; it is not the nation that brought the world universal values, but rather a land ruled by Catholicism and prejudice. It is true, he continues, that in the past the Jewish people suffered “numerous and terrible injustices” in the German lands, but now things have changed and the Germans are fighting against the Catholics, “our profound enemy.”²² Germany should be judged not by its past but by its future. Ahad Haam regarded France as the clear representative of the decadent spirit of the late nineteenth century; he saw France’s attempts to construct a new culture from scratch as futile, a testament to the impossibility of erasing the past. He described reading French literature as not only leading to secularism (“abandoning the faith”), but falling into bad ways.²³

In October 1897, Herzl repeated this superficial image to the Kaiser and his chancellor—probably in order to win their favor—and added that “those who seek entertainment will always come to France.” The chancellor responded: “Yes, cafés and brothels, as they say in Vienna,” and the Kaiser declared that the French were “a mad race.”²⁴ Herzl also talked with the French author René Bazin, while sailing from Izmir to Alexandria. In this conversation, he claimed: “mighty literature can disseminate weak ideas throughout the world, . . . but France today has neither great ideas nor a great literature.”²⁵

This conventional opinion is also expressed in the journalist Elchanan Leib Levinsky’s utopian “Masa Leeretz Israel Bishnat 2040.” Levinsky writes about a Hebrew teacher and his wife who travel from Russia to spend their honeymoon in Jerusalem and ponder the possibility of arriving there via Paris: “Because today, as in the days of our fathers and mothers, Paris is still the center of life, in the usual sense: the center of hedonism, of dance and fashion, and in general of the good life in the simple sense . . .

Women in particular are drawn to the new Babel.”²⁶ This image of French culture influenced the criticism that emerged regarding the lifestyle and educational system found in the settlements funded by Baron Rothschild. Avraham Shmuel Herschberg—an Orthodox *maskil* and member of Hibbat Zion, a proto-Zionist movement established in the 1880s that promoted Jewish settlement in Palestine, wrote that the baron’s sponsorship had brought “the flippant French spirit” to the settlements in Jewish Palestine, and that the schools were educating “wild and immoral Frenchmen, who hate their people and dismiss their Jewish religion.”²⁷

If this were indeed the prevailing image, we might expect the Jews to keep French culture very much at arm’s length. However, on the surface this was not the case. The influence of French culture on the intellectual Jewish elite began at the start of the nineteenth century, when the central topic on the elite’s agenda was how to digest the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, and their consequences. How these were regarded was influenced by, among other things, the special conditions of Jewish existence in Eastern Europe. The French heritage offered Jews the universal principles of equality and political and civil liberty for the individual—that is, the principles of a democratic or republican regime and the principles of a civil society, including those of separation of church and state and the appearance of a secular society. The French model also offered the principles of national self-determination as well as patriotism and identification with a homeland—a national state.²⁸

France could therefore serve as a source of inspiration for various conceptions and models of nationalism, such as republican nationalism, according to which the state is a union of individual parts united, according to their own will, by common law; and integrative nationalism, which emphasizes ethnic and cultural commonality.²⁹ The principle that nation and state were one and the same presented a great difficulty for Jews in Eastern Europe, who lived in a multinational and multiethnic society and thus preferred enlightened absolutism to democracy, which granted power to the majority. They considered a multinational empire a more comfortable sanctuary than the nation-state. Before World War I, even a radical Jewish movement like the Bund regarded the aspirations to self-rule of various territorial minorities in the Russian Empire—the Poles and Ukrainians—with suspicion and revulsion.³⁰ However, there were radical *maskilim* who congratulated France for its political culture, primarily for having abolished the Jesuits, overturned the rule of dark faith, and put an end to Catholic antisemitism.³¹ France also won praise because

it was seen as the begetter of movements that aimed to reform the world. Moses Hess wrote: “England, with its industrial organization, represents the nerve-force of humanity which directs and regulates the alimentary system of mankind; France, that of general motion, namely, the social; Germany discharges the function of thinking.” France, he added, effortlessly integrated humanism with nationalism; he described Germany, on the other hand, as Europe’s “cogitating brain.”³² Lilienblum wrote that France had not fallen after its defeat by Prussia in 1870 and the rise of the Third Republic: “The Republic will renew its strength, and all who are wise at heart, who cannot find success in the benighted countries, will make their way to France, and there they will gather their strength to fight for truth, to return Man’s fate to his own hands; and France’s light will yet make its way to all those who dwell in darkness and shadow, under unjust rule and ancient ways of thought. France has not fallen.”³³

Herzl had a rather different opinion of French political culture. His close acquaintance with the French political system inspired a revulsion toward popular politics and a clear preference for the political culture of England. He believed that England’s parliamentary regime was significantly preferable to the republican regime in France, which was a fertile ground for extremism and demagoguery. However, this dislike could not prevent the ideas of the French Revolution—namely, a representative democratic government, equality of political and civil rights, and a sovereign public—from becoming fundamental principles in Jewish political thought even before World War I. French thought, particularly the socialist and utopian streams, and French literature such as the French social novel had a great influence on Jewish thinkers, writers, and other creators in Eastern Europe.³⁴ The output of French culture, in contrast, achieved only secondary standing in the Hebrew cultural marketplace. Out of the hundreds of works translated from Western literature that were published by the Shtibel Publishing House from 1919 to 1939, only some 10 percent were translations of French literature.³⁵ Similarly, from 1935 to 1939, only 6.1 percent of the 408 films screened in Tel Aviv were in French, compared to 55.8 percent in English and 15.2 percent in German). It is of course difficult to estimate the influence of French literature in translation on Hebrew readers; it is also difficult to determine whether they adopted the behavior of the heroes and heroines of that literature.

In any case, the influence of French culture on the culture of the new Jewish society in Palestine was not limited because of its negative image or because of the fact that France—more accurately Paris, or “Parisian

fashion”—symbolized waxing bourgeois tendencies and a desire for luxury; instead, its influence was obstructed due to the absence of effective cultural agents. As a result, French culture’s influence on modern Jewish culture was evident mostly in the fields of literature and art, and this was because of the Jewish thinkers, writers, and artists who took up residence in Paris.

“LET US PRAISE ENGLAND”

In *The Travels of Benjamin the Third*, Mendele Mokher Seforim writes about a conversation between the students at the *beit midrash* (house of study) at Tzalmona, where two travelers—Benyamin and Senderl—arrive at the height of the Crimean War (1853–56). The occupants of the *beit midrash* relate fragmented news and rumors about the events taking place in the world outside and extol the glory of Queen Victoria. They also praise England’s machines—the steam engine and the train. Indeed, news of England of the Industrial Revolution, the British Empire that ruled the seas and spanned the entire world, had reached even tiny villages in Eastern Europe. England appeared to Jews not only as the opposite of autocratic Russia, but also as the antithesis of pleasure-loving France. Jewish literature made little effort to analyze the French character but attempted to understand the English character in depth, because the latter was considered a central factor in the makeup of England’s political culture and methods of government.

England appeared to East European *maskilim* as a positive model of political culture, with its constitutional monarchy and democratic parliament, and its liberal bourgeoisie and respect for tradition.³⁶ They shared this positive and even reverential perception with various intellectual circles in Europe³⁷—and this was well before the birth of the fateful political ties between Zionism and Britain in 1917, and British rule in Palestine. Jewish intellectuals expressed great appreciation for what they regarded as English rationalism, pragmatism, and liberalism. They saw the democratic, parliamentary government as a model and presented it as “an example to all the world”.³⁸ “Yes, dear reader, this legislature is a wonder before the entire world, a sign before many nations to follow its light and to tread its path.”³⁹ England was depicted as a blessed land—the cradle of technological and political progress—despite the great poverty there; and its political and civil culture was considered the highest demonstration of liberty. Kalman Shulman wrote: “Everyone who knows the ways

of England is filled with praise for it, and indeed let us praise England, for her government steers straight and true in its doings.”⁴⁰ The British spirit, wrote Ahad Haam, was one of “liberty, equality, and fellowship.”⁴¹ Peretz Smolenskin wrote that unlike the Germans, the British did not wish to impose their worldview upon all other nations. They were a practical people who did not stray toward fantasy and simplistic ideals, because they understood that actions speak louder than words. Their practicality made them the strongest in the world. Smolenskin added:

[The British people] is one of both thought and action, a people who act but who think before acting . . . These people do not wish to embrace the whole world as do the Ashkenazis [the Germans], nor do they yearn to bring it under their wings and rule over it as do the French; they know that a man’s first action must be to look first after his soul, and then after his body, and only then after others, because only in this way can one arrive at the supreme goal of improving the lot of all mankind.⁴²

According to Smolenskin, England had not declared war on faith and tradition, and therefore it should be taken as a model for creating improvements and change while maintaining an organic continuity: “and it is our duty to pay attention to this great thing as well, when we wish to launch innovations or reform the Jewish people.”⁴³

Yet even residence in England was not always enough to instill appreciation for English culture. It was difficult for a Jewish intellectual from Russia to consider it “the cultural capital of the world.” In London, Ahad Haam felt “like one who was cast into the great sea and swallowed by its waves—a foreign sapling that, imported from afar, clings to the land here from above in an unnatural way, its roots shallow.” As a result, he wrote, he would always feel in England as though he were in “a world that is not mine.”⁴⁴ Beyond his sensation of being an unwelcome guest, Ahad Haam was impressed by the British codes of behavior—the *Shulhan Arukh* (Jewish legal code) of etiquette, as he put it⁴⁵—and especially by the political culture characterized by self-discipline and ingrained political tradition. He was similarly impressed by the clamor and bustle of the city of London.⁴⁶ Despite his distance from English culture, Ahad Haam noted that England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had produced such great spirits as Shakespeare, Bacon, Locke, and Hume, who were “a light before the whole world to this very day.”⁴⁷ Shakespeare, he wrote, far exceeded Pushkin and Gogol with respect to his overall value to humanity.⁴⁸

As for Herzl, though he was no stranger to British culture, he was impressed most by its parliamentary government, which avoided the flaws of the republican government in France. He was not, however, impressed by England's cultural achievements.⁴⁹ Brenner wrote, decisively: "Their modern culture is unimportant, their writing empty and superficial." Still, he added that England had begat such "spiritual" geniuses as Byron, Shelley, Shakespeare, and Carlyle: "and we thank this giant nation, the nation of individual and political freedom, the nation of Locke and Hume, Mill and Darwin."⁵⁰ In addition to the contributions of its thinkers to world culture, Brenner found in England a culture worthy of appreciation for its daily life: "It has its good sides too, of course, which a citizen may enjoy: there are many tree gardens, it has peaceful suburbs, it has culture everywhere one goes," and it had "outward political freedom, which cannot be taken lightly at all."⁵¹

During the first part of Weizmann's stay in England, his impression of English culture was entirely negative. He believed that it was characterized by materialism and lacked poetry and intellectual depth and force. It was inferior to German culture and did not have the abundance of intellectual forces that existed in France:⁵² "England is a land of great social contrasts . . . The hypocrisy, querulousness, and shallowness of [English] society are prominently evident . . . Everything here is disguised with a misleading gloss, and internally, why, it is repulsive. England is a land of external 'respectability' that conceals shameful acts, politics, quarrels, private interests—all a great mess."⁵³ But after a short while, Weizmann changed his mind and became an overt Anglophile. He found that English politics were based on programmatic and realistic thought anchored in empiricism, rather than on formulas or simplistic idealism. "The British genius," he quoted Baron Rothschild, "is its empiricism . . . The Englishman is wary of logical casuistry and written documents," and thus Britain would never sign a constitution. The entire British system was one of oral law.⁵⁴

His Anglophilism convinced Weizmann that England, as he wrote Lord Balfour on November 19, 1917, was a "bulwark of right and justice and of the defence of the weak against the strong."⁵⁵ England's decisive role in determining the fate of the Jews, primarily in Palestine, meant that the need to understand the code of English political culture was of the utmost importance.⁵⁶ From here arose the urgent need to understand the "British mentality" and their "philosophy of life"—to quote Jabotinsky, who tried, perhaps more than any other Zionist leader, to crack that code. Before and during the British Mandate in Palestine, he devoted numerous

articles to this purpose, while claiming that it was impossible to describe a national character: "One can feel it, but not describe it."⁵⁷ According to Jabotinsky's portrayal, the British character was represented by level-headedness, practicality, a businesslike approach, fair play, conservatism, gentlemanliness, and most of all common sense; it had no lofty appetites detached from reality.

Thus the Zionist elite generally acquired a great appreciation for Britain. Even those circles that eventually developed a deep loathing for it and spoke of Britain as "perfidious Albion" could not help admiring various aspects of the British way or recognizing its status as the clear representative of the rational and realistic world. "We are all in favor of the Anglo-Saxon civilization," wrote Aba Achimeir, a radical Revisionist, "but what most represents it is—that the Anglo-Saxon nations are urban nations." According to Achimeir, England symbolized the opposite of the Zionist Socialist ideal, which was an ideal of rural society: "In spite of the old Zionism, Palestine is turning into Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool, for the advancement of all Asia. Our fundamental thesis is that the Jewish people are not, at present, an agricultural people. Nor will they be an agricultural people in the future."⁵⁸ At the same time, Achimeir declared that "the age of English culture" was the Elizabethan period, but that "the original spirit of English creativity is weak today, and incomparable to what it was in the time of Shakespeare and Milton."⁵⁹ Thus the Jewish elite in Palestine believed that there was a significant chasm between England—the motherland—and the representatives of British rule in Palestine, with whom the Zionist leadership, and to some extent the public at large, were in close contact.⁶⁰

However, perceptions were not what defined the domain and boundaries of French or British cultural influence on Jewish culture in Palestine. These were decided by the presence and activity of cultural agents, as well as by the affinity for that culture fostered through its literature. In contrast to the sparse activity of French cultural agents in Palestine, the British presence there during the Mandate had a deep influence on how the legislative, judicial, and executive systems were implemented in the Jewish community.⁶¹ The Mandate and knowledge of the English language made the presence of various components of English culture possible. It was even claimed that "precedence must be given to English literature, history, geography, and economics in comparison to [those of] other nations . . . Our students must understand the English spirit and way of life, the qualities and habits of the English man, the way he thinks

and reasons.”⁶² English literature in translation occupied an increasingly central position in the corpus of literature translated into Hebrew: until 1920, scarcely any books had been translated from English, but from 1930 to 1936, ninety-three books were translated from English, out of the 300 translated from various European languages. Not everyone approved of the ever-growing presence of literature translated from English. The author Yaakov Rabinovitz wrote, uneasily, that “the translated works are mostly garbage, or mediocre stock . . . Overnight, our readers of foreign literature have abandoned Dostoevsky in favor of Edgar Wallace.”⁶³

Thus it might be said that the elites of modern Jewish political culture and of Hebrew culture in Jewish Palestine acquired their ideological and political outlook, and their practical political experience, from Eastern Europe. It was there that they absorbed ideologies and experienced attempts at mending the world, and it was there that they learned the methods of modern political action. However, ultimately the templates of political society and its values were built on the foundations and principles of the British political regime. It is therefore possible to distinguish between, on the one hand, political mentality and political action with respect to political parties—which originated in the political culture of Eastern Europe, in particularly its revolutionary culture—and the principles of formal political behavior on the other.⁶⁴

In concluding this brief examination, we should mention that within the political and cultural discourse in Jewish society in Palestine—and in Israeli society today—England and France do not represent a declining, disintegrating Western culture. The negative heritage of European culture is symbolized primarily by Germany and Eastern Europe, rather than by cultural values associated with England and France. Still, and at times ironically, when Europe is referred to negatively in the public discourse and polemics, that rhetoric relegates both English and French culture to the group of cultures whose traits—which modern Jewish society has taken on and internalized—should be rejected. It would not be a wild conjecture to suppose that most of the opponents of European influence or European culture do not seriously believe that Israeli society should alter itself to expunge these traits.