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Introduction

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Introduction

Daniel Walden

Over the past few decades I have been able to go to two to five conferences a year. I regularly attend the American Literature Association Conferences (I was at the founding meeting at a NEMLA Conference in Delaware) and The Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Conference (which was founded by Gloria Cronin, Alan Berger, and Daniel Walden). I helped found *MELUS* with Katherine Newman and Evelyn Avery and a few others in 1975, and I regularly attended. I also used to go to the Popular Culture/American Culture Association Conference (I was one of the early supporters, along with Ray Browne and Marshall Fishwick) and the Modern Language Association Convention. I went to the Northeast Modern Language Association conferences, too. The year I was president, I brought William Styron as the major guest speaker. On 10-13 September 2008, I went to the thirteenth Annual Jewish American and Holocaust Symposium in Salt Lake City. We had gone to Boca Raton for years, but the threat of hurricanes defeated us there.

The recent JAHLLIT Symposium was a rousing success. Panels, guest speakers, and some forty to fifty interested academicians from around the country and world gathered to see, hear, and participate in fourteen sessions. From seniors to graduate students and a few undergraduates, papers were given on the old, that is, the classical, to the new, the modern. Saul Bellow, Chaim Potok, Philip Roth, and Bernard Malamud were represented, as were Samuel Ornitz, Elie Wiesel, and Primo Levi. So were Ehud Havazelet, Anne Michaels, Dara Horn, and Marge Piercy. Greg Bellow, Saul Bellow's eldest son, took part in a discussion of *The Partisan Review* and the Holocaust with Alan Berger; Jacqueline Osherow spoke on "American Poetry and the Holocaust," and Andrew Gordon, in the concluding panel, spoke on Roth's *The Plot Against America* contrasted with Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*.

In short, as I have witnessed it, there has been a transition—from a concentration on the Hart, Schaffner, and Marx figures (Bellow, Malamud, and Roth), to a blazing array of new currents in Jewish American literature. In the panels that I sponsored, at MLA, NEMLA, MELUS, PCA/ACA, at the ALA, and at the JAHLLIT

symposia, we have seen the ripening and maturing of the field. Witness the fantastic variety and span of the people and literatures represented in this volume of *Studies in American Jewish Literature*. Note that a wide geographical range, American and Japanese, is here, as well as a grand variety of subjects. When Irving Howe and Leslie Fiedler predicted the demise of Jewish American Literature, as far back as the 1970s, they were simply wrong. American Jewish Literature grew, and the process is continuing. Just as American Jewish literature was growing and changing then, which they could not see, so it is continuing to grow and change and mature now—and will continue to grow in the future.

Daniel Walden, Editor