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Since the publication of *Jewish American Literature: A Norton Anthology* (2001) and Michael P. Kramer and Hana Wirth-Nesher’s *Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature* (2003), the field of American Jewish literature has changed dramatically not only in terms of how it is defined but also in methods used for interpreting that new diversity. Enter these recent essay collections. In *Caribbean Jewish Crossings*, editors Sarah Phillips Casteel and Heidi Kaufman shed light on Jewish life in the Caribbean through an analysis of literature from this region by and about Jews. The essays deliberately cross disciplinary borders, borrowing from history, art, and anthropology. In contrast, *The New Jewish American Literary Studies* as edited by Victoria Aarons takes a more theory-driven approach and self-consciously engages in a philosophical discussion of the goals and methods used in literary analysis. The different strategies speak to a more fundamental split in comparative literature and cultural studies. While both approaches are equally valid, *Caribbean Jewish Crossings* may prove more useful for those outside of literature departments. It is also the more radical in its implicit challenge to US-centered interpretations of “Americanness.”

The essays included in *Caribbean Jewish Crossings* take a broad approach to defining Jewish American literature. First, there is the location of the Caribbean itself. A key shift in Jewish American literary studies since 2001 has been a change in how “America” is understood. *Caribbean Jewish Crossings* rethinks both “America” and the methods used for interpreting that diversity. Prior to 1825, the largest Jewish communities in the Americas were all in the Caribbean, and for the first time, *Caribbean Jewish Crossings* provides an overview of what Caribbean Jews have contributed to American literary studies. Second, the volume sidesteps policing who or what is a Jew by embracing authors of Jew-
ish descent—regardless of their halachic status—as a way of thinking about Jewishness in the Caribbean as inherently cross-cultural. Third, and equally important, the volume balances analysis of writings by Jewish-descended people from the Caribbean with those by non-Jewish Caribbean authors who “have a long tradition of weaving together African and Diasporic narratives and, in the process, have identified or forged cultural and historical connections between them” (2). Methodologically, the volume is also interested in “critical ambivalences” as it moves between the vocabularies of Jewish and Caribbean studies (4). This ambivalence reflects the scholars’ refusal to position Jews as solely victims or solely oppressors. This tactic is crucial, as it allows the essays to address both the impact of slavery and the Holocaust on Caribbean Jewish literature without privileging one over the other. In all of these arenas, the book functions as a case study of how scholars can rethink Jewish American literary history by thinking about American Jews—and American Jewish studies—as part of an intertwined, transnational nexus.

Caribbean Jewish Crossings is divided into four sections. “The Emergence of Caribbean Jewish Literary Culture” begins in the second half of the eighteenth century in Suriname with an analysis of David Nassy’s Essai historique (1788) by Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger. This essay points to the way that the volume willingly engages questions of how the definition of “literature” has changed across the centuries. “Revisiting the Inquisition and the Sephardic Caribbean” focuses on the inquisition, providing important ideas for how the Caribbean literature stands at the crossroads of Europe as well as North and South America. “Colonialism and Caribbean Holocaust Memory” uses writing both by and about Jews to decenter the Holocaust as a Jewish study by looking at how Jewish and Black diasporas intertwine. Compellingly, “Contemporary Voices: Narrative and Poetry” consists of a brief selection of contemporary literature by writers from a wide geographic range, including works translated from Dutch.

The drawbacks of this volume are primarily indicative of the way in which it is a beginning gesture in the field. Although the book later returns to the 1730s, it seems sad to begin in 1788 when there is a wealth of early poetry and travel narratives that this volume omits. Moreover, much of this early literature would help enhance the story of crossings that interest the editors. In addition, the selections of primary works at the end of the book point to the need for a complete anthology of Caribbean Jewish literature or even a detailed list of authors and works that should be studied. While this is beyond the current volume’s agenda, such a list would help flesh out many of the case studies that are included here.
Still, this is a breathtaking and crucial book. The methods are innovative, important, and address key questions in the field about how to bridge American literary criticism and multicultural literary studies. Although the editors of *Caribbean Jewish Crossings* profess to be solely interested in the Caribbean, much of their innovative approach could be retooled to create a more diverse and inclusive approach for reading Jewish literature from the United States. As such, the volume should be considered critical reading for graduate students in the field as well as scholars interested in embracing more diverse definitions of “America” and intersectional approaches.

*The New Jewish American Literary Studies* is a very different sort of book. The volume stands on the shoulders of decades of scholarship seeking to understand “the various stages of Jews navigating America *qua* America” (4). Unlike earlier histories of Jewish American literature that have been interested in how it has varied by time, place, or culture, this volume is part of a series specifically aimed at changes in critical approaches since 2000. That is, this is a book on innovations in literary analysis, *not* literary history. Readers should be also aware that all the essays focus on “contemporary American literature,” even though this limitation is not clear from the way the book has been marketed. The definition of contemporary used by the authors varies somewhat, though contemporary tends to mean post-World War II. Moreover, the “literature” discussed is primarily narrative literature: poetry and drama are largely ignored, without any explanation of what motivated their exclusion.

Because of the volume’s more narrow time frame and relative lack of interest in historical progression or context, *The New Jewish American Literary Studies* is arranged around methodological approaches rather than key authors, genres, regions, or eras. Part 1, “Concepts,” uses six different frames for thinking about Jewish American literature: hybridity, diasporas, politics, Israel, race, and gender. Part 2, “Contexts,” looks at five possible ways of contextualizing literary production: post-war, psychoanalysis, the past, women’s voices, and religion. Part 3 provides a mixture of “New Forms” like Holocaust narratives, cinema and television, and memoir, and “New Histories,” including Latin America and Literary Studies Abroad.

Three essays stand out in the first section on “Concepts.” In “Israel and America in Jewish American Writing,” Eli Lederhendler looks at how contemporary Jewish American fiction that invokes Israel “renders Israel uncanny” (70). Lederhendler argues that unlike fiction from the years just following World War II and from 1948–1970s in which Israel played a limited role, Israel (and Hebrew) are widely used to invoke an
“inflected ‘othering’” in third-generation Jewish American experience (64). Another strong essay in this section is Dean Franco’s “Jewish American Writing and Race,” which rightly points out that the Jews of the mass migration need to be considered as “part of a settler colonial project, insofar as they symbolized the broader effort to populate the erstwhile frontier” (86). Strangely, despite the fact that roughly 12% of American Jews today live in non-white, Hispanic, or multiracial households, Franco seems to read all American Jews as white and ignores the large amount of contemporary literature by Jews of color and how such literature might nuance our understanding of race. A third striking essay in this section is Jessica Lang’s “Gender and Feminism in Contemporary Jewish American Writing.” This essay is one of the most powerful in terms of considering a wide range of types of literature, including new media. Despite a brief discussion of Transparent, however, the essay in general does not actively interrogate dismantling of gender as a binary. This seems like large oversight given that the queering of gender binaries has had a huge impact on recent Jewish American literature, particularly the wealth of coming out narratives by nonbinary and transgender Jews.

While “Concepts” is concerned with broader interpretive paradigms, historians may be surprised that despite the name, “Contexts” still focuses on theoretical approaches rather than cultural or historical settings. The difference between the first two sections seems to be overviews of approaches (“Concepts”) versus applications of approaches to individual authors and texts (“Contexts”). “Rethinking Post-war Jewish American Writers,” for example, examines the era through the lens of Phillip Roth, Saul Bellow, and Cynthia Ozick. David Brainder looks at the work of Ozick, Michael Chabon, Sarah Schulman, and Gary Shteyngart through the lens of myth and history, while Catherine Morley looks at women’s voices in the fiction of Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Avinoam Patt uses religion and heresy as a lens for examining Shulem Deen, as a part of the trend of Jewish writers who are “OTD” (off-the-derech).

The third section, “‘New’ Forms and Histories,” examines postmodern genres and literature from outside the United States. This is probably the most exciting section of the book, as we finally see some of the diversity promised in the introduction. This section challenges the book’s general emphasis on narrative fiction and includes Nathan Abrams’s extremely useful overview of cinema and television, two genres central to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Likewise, Judie Newman expands our notion of both American Jews and literature by focusing on Mizrahi memoirs. Darrell Lockhart’s “Jewish Latin American Literature” more thoroughly incorporates Sephardic Jewish literature into the story of American Judaism even as it provides a much-welcome glimpse of the
vast literary world beyond the US border. This last essay deserves its own volume.

One of the disadvantages of the book’s organization is that it often reifies the very categories it proposes to interrogate by sequestering them into separate chapters. The chapters on race and gender, for example, might each be improved and refreshed by a more intersectional approach. Likewise, the relegating of race and Latin America to one chapter each suggests that the dominant paradigm in the rest of the book is white (Ashkenazi) Jews from the United States. The cloistering of sex and gender into two essays has the similar impact of presenting the normative Jew as the cis, straight man. With the exception of Darrell Lockhart’s superb chapter on Jewish-Latin American literature, race only appears in the chapter on race; queer and nonbinary issues arise only in the chapter on sexuality; and so on. It is hard not to wonder if part of the problem here is a certain lack of diversity among the contributors. While I appreciate that the editor sought out authors from outside the US, each section of the book has only one essay by a female scholar, and two of these are relegated to discussing gender. Nonwhite, transgender, nonbinary, and non-Ashkenazi scholars have helped reshape the field since 2000. More attention to their contribution would be useful. A second missed opportunity is the strangely limiting way that most of the contributors define “literature.” With the exception of Abrams’s essay, a brief allusion to YouTube by Lang, and passing mention of Art Spiegelman, the volume largely ignores the genres of Jewish American literature which were invented between 1945–2019, such as graphic novels, comics, and digital literature.

Despite these drawbacks, New Jewish American Literary Studies should play an important role in courses in Jewish American literature, as it offers a useful way for students to think about different critical paradigms in literary analysis. The essays are clearly written and are beautifully edited in order to maximize the greatest impact in a short amount of space.

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