

Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust: Displaced Witnesses. By Phyllis Lassner. Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 256 pp. \$75.00 cloth.

Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness. By Maren Tova Linett. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 242 pp. \$106.99 cloth.

Together these two books make a significant contribution to the exploration of Jewish representations in modern British literature that has been taken up recently in literary scholarship and Jewish Studies. Maren Linett and Phyllis Lassner both expand existing knowledge in this area and challenge received understandings by foregrounding gender as a key factor in the negotiation of Anglo-Jewish identities, but they do so in different ways. Though equally concerned with the representation of Jewishness in British women's writing in the twentieth century, Linett's study focuses on the "allosemitism" of Jewish representation by non-Jews writing within the context of modernism. Her project is an ambitious one, as signalled by its title, which juxtaposes three terms that are contested, debated, and reconfigured continually in scholarship. By exploring modernism, feminism, and Jewishness, Linett seeks to explore the aesthetic and political roles played by Jewish characters in the fiction of Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, Dorothy Richardson, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Djuna Barnes, thereby shedding light on these authors as modernist and feminist writers. For Linett her chosen authors are indicative of the modernist woman writer who "found in the fictional Jew a floating signifier she could use to define the contours of her literary endeavours" (188), and she is centrally concerned, not with labelling their representations as either antisemitic or philosemitic, but with arguing for their "*dependence on Jewishness*" in their construction of a feminist modernism (189).

Linett is slightly disingenuous in claiming in her introduction that studies of representations of the Jew in modernism have been restricted to "canonical male authors" (9): the work of Maria Damon on Gertrude Stein, Amy Feinstein on Stein and Mina Loy, and Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *Genders, Races and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry 1908-1934*, belie Linett's characterization of the field. In the main body of *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness* Linett undertakes extensive and often very convincing analyses of her chosen authors' use of Jewishness: how Warner, Rhys, and Woolf explore the possibility of an artistic sphere untouched by the profit motive, using the association of Jews with money to figure the literary as marketplace; how Richardson and Woolf use the rhetoric of supersession to posit their feminist modernism as an advance in art; what Woolf and Warner do with the association of Jews with modernity; the paradoxical intersections of gender and Jewishness in Barnes and Richardson's writing;

how Barnes and Rhys use Jewishness to write out traumatic dislocation; and finally, what we should make of the metafictional deployment of Jewishness by Richardson and Woolf. Linett offers admirable detail in places and, for example, an excellent contextualization and exploration of the discourse of supersession. She does not condemn any of her women writers, though Woolf emerges as riven by antisemitic anxieties, but she is concerned to confirm her central proposal that we must rethink our responses to the feminism of specific writers simply because they represent Jewishness, even if they attempt positive reconceptualizations. As a result she employs some slightly cumbersome maneuvers, such as juxtaposing Rhys and Warner's textual attempt to "revise" the link between Jews and money with Woolf's problematic use of this link and concluding that an "antisemitism stains the very feminist project we admire" (59).

Nevertheless, Linett really does require us to challenge our assumptions, and the central thesis of her book, that "feminist modernism relies on Jewishness as a shaping tool to tackle some of its most crucial thematic and structural challenges" (189), is worth considering and defending even if her methodology is uneven. Linett makes extensive use of Woolf's drafts, sketches, diaries, and letters, relying heavily on the draft of *The Pargiters* to read the presence of the "Jew in the bath" scene in *The Years* and drawing stark conclusions about Woolf's use of antisemitic stereotypes of the greedy, pullulating Jew. In contrast, her analysis of Barnes's *Nightwood* makes no use of archival material, nor does it draw on any other of Barnes's texts. Of course, material by or on Barnes is more limited than that on Woolf, but the end result is a skewed picture of Barnes's work that makes her presence in Linett's analysis doubly awkward. Barnes is the only American writer in a study explicitly focused "mainly on British modernism" (2), and Linett is too dismissive of Barnes's early "serious" (11) literary career: Barnes was publishing poems, plays, stories, illustrations, and drawings from the age of twenty-one and thus did not make the "belated entrance onto the literary scene" that Linett attempts to establish as "an important disparity between male and female writers of the period" (11).

One suspects that *Nightwood* features in *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness* simply because it is very difficult to conceive of a study of modernist novels working under these three terms that does not include Barnes's text. That Linett's reading of *Nightwood* is regressive rather than cutting-edge points to a second problem with Linett's methodology: the deployment of biographical "sexual trauma" for textual elucidation. This is not to say that Trauma Studies has nothing to offer a critical study of Jewishness in literature—Lassner's book, as discussed below, is evidence of the importance of this approach—but in *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness* personal trauma is too directly equated with textual strategies and used to justify such assertions as that Barnes and Rhys believed

“Jewish history resembles their personal traumatic histories” (142). In the case of Barnes, Linett follows a problematic strand in past biography and criticism to locate Barnes’s supposed experiences of incest and sexual abuse behind the textual complexities of *Nightwood*. In the case of Rhys Linett is required, by her approach, to argue both that Rhys attaches her own (sexually) traumatized mind to Jewish figures and that Serge Rubin, the Jewish artist in *Good Morning, Midnight*, is one of the “few men in any Rhys novel” who does not exploit or condescend to the protagonist (164). The intricacies and multiplicities of the modernist text suffer under this approach, which reduces, categorizes, and asserts in an attempt to diagnose the representations of Jewishness. And perhaps this is the weak point as well as the ultimate strength of *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness*: Linett takes a polemical line, requiring her reader to acknowledge that Jewishness does matter for our understanding of women modernists’ writing, but in the insistence of her argument, she disbars any textual nuance that might contradict it.

Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust is situated in a different discursive and historical space, treating post-Second World War writing and thus necessarily making a contribution to Holocaust Studies as well as to Modernist Studies. Indeed, Lassner asks at the opening of her study “Why is the Holocaust still being written?” given the ethical minefield of Holocaust representation (1). As her study goes on to argue, Anglo-Jewish writers record a British memory of the Holocaust in order to engage with English culture without inscribing their own marginality to that culture; representing the Holocaust is thus a political and an ethical undertaking for these writers. Redressing the fact that British writers of the Holocaust have received little critical attention, *Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust* explores the autobiographical and imaginative writing of Anglo-Jewish women writers, writers “concern[ed] with gender identity and the relationship between Jewish women as bearers of Jewish identity and issues about Jewish continuity” (5). The choice of writers in this study brings together Kindertransport writers, Second Generation writers, children of refugees and other Anglo-Jewish writers who explore the refugee experience—what Lassner terms a “generation of imaginative witnesses” (187) that includes Karen Gershorn, Diane Samuels, Anne Karpf, Lisa Appignanesi, Elaine Feinstein, Julia Pascal, and Sue Frumin.

Kindertransport writing is crucial to *Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust* as it serves to fully expose the contradictions of refugee Jews in Britain: the Kindertransport refugees are the “most dramatic sign of affirming Britain’s liberalism” and difference from the anti-Semitism of Europe (8), but also inspire suspicion, the Anglo-Jewish community’s fear of antisemitic backlash, and a pressure to acculturate to British homogeneity. Lassner identifies the “liminal space occupied by these Jewish

refugees—neither open nor closed yet both” (12) and points to displacement and uncertain knowing as key features of texts which deal with Holocaust refugees and their families.

In its main body, Lassner’s book contextualizes and explores Kindertransport memoirs, showing how the memoirs rework and revise German folktales such as Hansel and Gretel into “elegies, narratives of mourning” (34); the complex and developing sense of female selfhood in Gershorn’s writing, her discontinuous storytelling, and her examination of sexuality; the focus on women’s intergenerational relations and on memory and silence in Samuels’s 1995 play *Kindertransport*; the trauma of the Second Generation in Karpf and Appignanesi; Feinstein’s representation of Jewish history, experience, and continuity; and the “polemical dramaturgy” of Pascal and Frumin (169). Lassner consistently interweaves her readings of texts with details about the intractable position of the Kindertransport Jewish refugees in Britain, their treatment by foster families, the attitudes of psychologists and the Anglo-Jewish community, and the history of Jews in England and Poland. She unearths in her writers’ works and approaches—Gothic motifs, the figure of the Wandering Jew, the use of fairy tales—and an overarching sense of discontinuity and disorientation. These features in turn point to shared strategies for encountering the knowledge of the Holocaust as incomplete or unfulfilled; rather than certainty, the “uncanny and unstable, even grotesque” characterizes this writing, a feature that crosses generic and biographical distinctions (16).

Lassner’s analysis is substantial and persuasive, and she certainly connects a variety of texts and writers together in support of her argument for the importance of Anglo-Jewish women writing the Holocaust to the evolving narrative of contemporary Britain. Some chapters are less successful than others: the first chapter on Kindertransport memoirs often deals in generalizations and brief references, concluding with a detailed critical account of Lore Segal’s *Other People’s Houses* that picks up on only some of the previous points. The chapter on Feinstein, wide-ranging and interesting as it is, does not tally structurally or thematically with the other chapters.

What *Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust* achieves without doubt is a thorough critique of the accepted version of Britain’s absolute opposition to Nazism and antisemitism. Lassner’s reading of Pascal’s *Theresa* exemplifies this: she shows that this play is not primarily an engagement with the historiographic stakes of accurately portraying collaboration in the Nazi-occupied Channel Islands, but with the normalizing of British antisemitism. And throughout *Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust* we are offered a Britain that accepted but also silenced, alienated, and dislocated Jewish refugees, and are asked to consider what strategies women writers adopted “to transmit and translate lost or neglected stories into their imaginative and investigative visions” (184). At its most powerful, Lassner’s

analysis reveals the distinct dynamics of Holocaust drama, explaining how it offers an embodied, shared experience that makes its audience acutely conscious of the absent or missing reality of the Holocaust, something we cannot experience even as we experience the bodies on stage enacting a Holocaust drama. Lassner makes a particularly insightful and convincing case that Samuels's *Kindertransport* undoes, in the figure of Evelyn, the supposed liberation of postmodern performativity; her performance of an assimilated, British, female identity inevitably brings to mind the trauma, rupture, and violence that has made this performance necessary. In this, and in other ways, Lassner shows how Anglo-Jewish women writing the Holocaust utilize what seem to be postmodern textual strategies but are actually a necessary response to the trauma of displacement, dislocation, and elision that is the experience of Jewish refugees in Britain. And here is the common ground between *Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust* and *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness*: both studies challenge us to rethink the categories of British literature in the twentieth century and to reconfigure the terms—modernism and postmodernism—through which we seek to understand that literature.

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