

1 HANNA WIRTH-NESHER, ed., *The Cambridge*
 2 *History of Jewish American Literature* (New
 3 York: Cambridge UP, 2016), 732 pp.

5 This much-needed volume brings Jewish
 American literature as an ethnic literature
 back on the critical agenda. That the very
 concept should have almost vanished from
 the landscape of critical debates is notewor-
 thy in and of itself, and its neglect is poi-
 gnantly manifest, for instance, in the mar-
 10 ginalization of Jewish American literature in
 the curricula of English and American Stud-
 ies in the U.S. In 2009, a panel at the MLA
 convention with the title “Does the English
 Department Have a Jewish Problem?” ac-
 15 knowledged the situation and discussed the
 place of Jewish literature in twenty-first-
 century American literary studies. One of
 the central topics debated there—whether
 recent theoretical and critical developments
 such as whiteness studies, transnational stud-
 20 ies, comparative ethnic studies, etc. have
 opened new ways of conceptualizing Jewish
 literature—is also reflected in the particular
 organization of this volume. Without simply
 turning back to traditional paradigms of cat-
 egorization, the anthology argues against the
 view that Jewish American literature has lost
 25 its character as identifiably ethnic writing, as
 it is argued in some of the many redefini-
 tions of ethnicity and minority culture that
 have taken place over the last decades in the-
 oretical debates. Concomitantly, Jewish Amer-
 30 icans who have made it into the mainstream
 no longer qualify as ethnic Americans, and,
 as Hana Wirth-Nesher sums up in her intro-
 duction to the volume, “their literature is not
 included in a canon whose primary criterion
 is the production of fissures and tensions
 rather than the appreciation of diversity” (6).
 35 In contrast, *The Cambridge History of Jew-
 ish American Literature* aims at a reexami-
 nation of constructs and categories of minor-
 ity writing and ethnicity, taking into account
 the transnational character of Jewishness.

40 The volume explores distinguishing charac-
 teristics of Jewish American culture, such as
 religion, peoplehood, race, and language, in
 light of the recent debates, and further aims
 to bestow Jewish American literature the hy-
 44 brid status of being both American and part
 of a transnational, diasporic literary tradi-
 45 tion. The general organization of the volume
 reflects this intention with five parts repre-
 46 senting five different approaches that reoccur

in each of the following sections: discovery,
 genre and period, place, creating fields, and
 innovation/new perspectives. The first part,
 “New World Encounters,” addresses the im-
 migration history of Jewish Americans and
 their initial encounter with U.S. culture, or
 rather, the encounter with the idea of Amer-
 ica. Part two, “Genres: Adopting, Adapting,
 Reinventing,” is quite classical in its descrip-
 tion of Jewish American literature according
 to genre. As fiction writing bears the brunt of
 Jewish American literary expression, it fol-
 lows a chronological order and is divided into
 the traditional literary periods of 1900-1945,
 1945-1970, and 1970-2000 and traces the rise
 of Jewish American literature from the mar-
 gins into the mainstream of American litera-
 50 ture production. That the chronology ends at
 the turn of the millennium is one of the dis-
 appointments of this volume, as it misses out
 on exciting developments that have since
 taken place in Jewish American fiction writ-
 ing. New forms of expression such as the im-
 portant and provocative “camp comedy”
 genre and its representatives (Melvin Jules
 Bukiet, Shalom Auslander, Tova Reich) are
 not mentioned at all—a deplorable omis-
 sion that even the very last contribution to
 the volume, which addresses Jewish Ameri-
 55 can literature since 2000, does not amend.

The parts on poetry and drama consider
 the significance of religious reflections and
 the use of Yiddish as a medium of expres-
 sion and also feature an informative contri-
 bution on “Jews and Film.” Contrary to most
 anthologies, there are no single author chap-
 ters, yet prominent authors are discussed
 in different contributions from a variety of
 perspectives. Section three, “Place and Peo-
 60 plehood: Redefining ‘Here’ and ‘There,’” is
 certainly one of the key parts of the volume
 as it reflects the transnational character of
 Jewish American literature and explores im-
 portant elements of Jewish American self-
 understanding, such as remembering the
 Middle Eastern past (and thereby drawing
 on the diasporic dimension of Jewish Ameri-
 65 can existence), the role of Israel and the
 Holocaust in the construction of Jewish
 American literature, and Hebrew and
 Ladino as non-English vehicles of express-
 ing Jewish American identity. This part also
 considers geographical questions, includ-
 ing the importance of New York as a space
 of *Yidishkayt*, and investigates the hemispheric
 70 dimension of Jewish American literature in
 contributions on Canada and Latin America.
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assumption that underlies this section and informs the entire approach of this anthology is a conceptualization of Jewish American literature as cosmopolitan and global, as expanding the scope of nation. The fourth part, "Creating Fields," asks about the construction, demarcation and definition of the field of Jewish American literature and the roles played here by public intellectuals, by literary anthologies, and by processes of translation. The contributions to the fifth and final section, "New Perspectives," intersect with concerns that dominate contemporary debates in the larger fields of literary and cultural theory. They consider questions of race and gender, explore important visual genres such as comic

books and graphic novels, deal with issues of popular culture, and, not least, raise the famous question of Jewish humor.

The contributions, all written by acknowledged experts in the field, are informative, and they grant an up-to-date and highly differentiated survey of the field. This volume is as useful as it is usable, and due to its intricate organization, allows easy access to pertinent perspectives on the topic that expand the customary format of the subject. As such, this book sets the standard for a contemporary anthology and will certainly support research by students and teachers alike.

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