
Review: Review Essay: The "Boom" of Latin American-Jewish Literary Studies

Reviewed Work(s): *Pertenencia y alteridad. Judíos en/de América Latina: cuarenta años de cambios* by Haim Avni; *Literatura de inmigrantes árabes y judíos en Chile y México* by Rodrigo Cánovas; *Voces judías en la literatura chilena* by Rodrigo Cánovas Emhart and Jorge Scherman Filer; *Trauma, Memory and Identity in Five Jewish Novels from the Southern Cone* by Debora Cordeiro Rosa; *Múltiples identidades: literatura judeo-latinoamericana de los siglos XX y XXI* by Verena Dölle; *Made of Shores: Judeo-Argentinian Fiction Revisited* by Amalia Ran; *Returning to Babel: Jewish Latin American Experiences, Representations, and Identity* by Amalia Ran and Jean Axelrod Cahan

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REVIEWS

Review Essay: The “Boom” of Latin American-Jewish Literary Studies

- Avni, Haim, et al, eds. *Pertenencia y alteridad. Judíos en/de América Latina: cuarenta años de cambios*. Madrid: Iberoamericana-Vervuert; Bonilla Artigas Editores, 2011. 870 pp. ISBN: 978-84-8489-518-3.
- Cánovas, Rodrigo. *Literatura de inmigrantes árabes y judíos en Chile y México*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2011. 295 pp. ISBN: 978-84-8489-593-0.
- Cánovas Emhart, Rodrigo, y Jorge Scherman Filer. *Voces judías en la literatura chilena*. Santiago: Cuarto Propio, 2010. 195 pp. ISBN: 978-956-260-504-5.
- Cordeiro Rosa, Debora. *Trauma, Memory and Identity in Five Jewish Novels from the Southern Cone*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012. 189 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7391-7297-1.
- Dolle, Verena, ed. *Múltiples identidades: literatura judeo-latinoamericana de los siglos XX y XXI*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2012. 267 pp. ISBN: 978-84-8489-639-5.
- Ran, Amalia. *Made of Shores: Judeo-Argentinian Fiction Revisited*. Bethlehem, MD: Lehigh UP, 2011. 173 pp. ISBN: 978-1-61146-014-8.
- Ran, Amalia, and Jean Axelrod Cahan, eds. *Returning to Babel: Jewish Latin American Experiences, Representations, and Identity*. Boston: Brill, 2012. 241 pp. ISBN: 978-90-04-20395-2.

There can be no doubt that the study of Latin American Jewish literature has come into its own as a field of serious academic inquiry in the twenty-first century. More and more Jewish authors are lending their voices to Latin American literature, classes are being created and taught in universities around the world, a burgeoning of doctoral dissertations has occurred, and scholarly activity is producing an abundance of research. Finally, Latin America has gained entrance to Jewish Studies in the United States and Jewish Studies has become an important component of Latin American literary scholarship. Clearly, as this selection of books demonstrates, this “boom” of scholarly interest in Latin American Jewish literature is not restricted to the North American academy. Scholars working in Israel, Europe, Latin America and North America are contributing to investigative projects that are filling voids and opening new avenues of research. This essay addresses the scope and impact of the scholarship contained in these seven volumes published in the short span of 2010 to 2012.

The monumental volume—nearly 900 pages in length—*Pertenencia y alteridad. Judíos en/de América Latina: cuarenta años de cambios* is edited by a team of renowned scholars associated with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: Haim Avni, Judit Bokser Liwerant, Sergio DellaPergola, Margalit Bejarano, and Leonardo Senkman. As the title indicates, the volume focuses on the past forty years (roughly 1967-2010) and encompasses a broad expanse of fields that range in approach from demographics to political science to history, education and, of course, literature, intersecting with a variety of other disciplines along the way. With a total of thirty-one essays, *Pertenencia y alteridad* contains a vast amount of information and a diversity of perspectives that seek to define and debate the “place” of Jews in/from Latin America; the identity politics of deliberately choosing “Judíos en/de América Latina” as the subtitle are explained in the introduction. For purposes of this essay, my remarks focus only on the last

section of the book, “Transformaciones lingüísticas y creación cultural,” which consists of five essays.

Perla Sneh, who has long been a leading advocate for the preservation of Yiddish and Yiddishkeit in Argentina, leads this section with her essay “Ídish al sur, una rama en sombras.” Sneh’s thoroughly researched and documented essay traces the origins and troubled continuity of Yiddish in Latin America. Her examination of literary authors and editors, the once thriving Yiddish theater and newspapers, as well as contemporary champions of language and humor—such as the late Eliahu Toker—delineates a rich history and culture. Toker’s mission to preserve Yiddish is evidenced in such titles as his *El ídish es también Latinoamérica* (2003). One of the more resounding legacies of Yiddish in Latin America is the intense activity in translation in both directions; that is Yiddish to Spanish/Portuguese and vice versa. This has left us with a rich collection of translations from the Yiddish by early authors such as Pinie Wald, Marcos Alpersohn, and Jacobo Glantz to name but a few. Conversely, it resulted in the Yiddish translations of such authors as José Hernández (*Martín Fierro*), Ricardo Güiraldes (*Don Segundo Sombra*), Jorge Luis Borges, and Alfonsina Storni. Sneh’s article does an excellent job at identifying the major figures and summarizing the key moments in the history of Yiddish in Latin America.

Leonardo Senkman begins his essay “El judaísmo en la cultura de América Latina: legitimación o representación” by posing a question: “¿De qué modo la representación de los judíos y el judaísmo cambió en la cultura latinoamericana durante los últimos cuarenta años?” To answer this query he begins by tracing the history of Jewish publishing in Latin America—focusing primarily on the cases of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. Senkman analyzes the publishing and reception of such Jewish philosophers as Spinoza and Buber in Latin American editions. He goes on to examine the history of contemporary Judaism in publishing and intellectual circles of the above countries. By looking at the types of books on Jewish issues that are published, he makes a point regarding the forging of a space for Jewish identity in Latin American and the acceptance/non-acceptance of such an intellectual (and political) enterprise. The second half of the essay focuses on the legitimacy of Jewish culture under both authoritarian and democratic regimes in Brazil and Argentina. He concludes with a discussion of cultural pluralism and Jewish culture in Argentina.

While Senkman made some references to literary texts in his essay, the three remaining essays in this section—by Saúl Sosnowski, Ricardo Feierstein and Florinda F. Goldberg—focus specifically on literature by Jewish authors over the past forty years. In his essay, Sosnowski provides a thoughtful meditation on the progress and presence of Jewish literature over the past forty years. He points to the “boom” in Latin American Jewish literature, drawing parallels to that other Latin American literary “boom,” but at the same time questions the motivating forces behind it. As a continuation of his previous work, Sosnowski writes of ever changing positions of identity, cultural plurality, language, and how they impact the way we think of Jewish writing. For his part, Argentine author Ricardo Feierstein writes on what he calls the “barrio judío de la ciudad literaria latinoamericana.” He identifies and defines seven different thematic “avenues” (all related to memory) in this imaginary city along which Jewish writers traverse; nostálgica, lingüística, existencial, mestizada, posmoderna, plural, tecnológica. Feierstein illustrates his essay with a series of graphs and charts and provides a three point conclusion to this well-developed essay on contemporary Jewish writing. This section concludes with the essay by Florinda F. Goldberg, in which she also addresses the complex notion of Jewish identity as played out on the Latin American stage. She uses the metaphor of “la frontera” to describe the difficult position of Jewish authors on the border between “lo judío” y “lo latinoamericano.” She also describes a series of models by which this body of literature can be categorized, such as the literature of recuperation, autobiography, *mestizaje*, (meta)historical fiction, and hyphenated identity positions.

For understandable demographic reasons, the majority of scholarship on Latin American-Jewish literature has focused on Argentina, and to a lesser extent Brazil and Mexico. While there has long been a void in the bibliography on writers from other countries, in recent years researchers have begun to address this paucity. The books by Cánovas and Cánovas/Scherman Filer have covered significant ground in this area. His *Literatura de inmigrantes árabes y judíos en Chile y México* also is in keeping with the trend of bringing together Jews and Arabs in a cultural studies context (see, for example, *Árabes y judíos en Iberoamérica*, edited by Raanan Rein [2008]). Cánovas divides his study in halves, discussing first the literature of Jewish authors in Chile and Mexico, then dedicating the second half to the case of Arab authors. He concludes with a final section titled “Diálogo Americano.” In both instances, his approach is that of a survey that begins with the historical and social background of each group in the respective countries. His discussion of Jewish authors, while loosely organized around thematic axes, may be described as encyclopedic in that the approach is to provide a schematic survey of literature by Jewish authors rather than an in depth analysis of texts. It is noteworthy that his discussion of Mexico is not limited to the obvious authors (Margo Glantz, Sabina Berman, Rosa Nissán Esther Seligson, Angelina Muñiz-Huberman), but also includes far less known authors such as Vicky Nizri, Gerardo Kleinburg, Salomón Laiter, and José Woldenberg. Likewise, in the section on Jewish authors from Chile the reader will be pleased to find mention of the prolific but somewhat forgotten Efraím Szmulewicz, along with contemporary authors who are becoming well-known in Chile (Roberto Brodsky, Andrea Jeftanovic, Cynthia Rimsky). Of course, the obvious authors are here as well: Agosin, Dorfman, Jodorowsky, Guralnik.

The study of Latin American literature by authors of Arab origin is a much newer field of inquiry, and here Cánovas makes an even more significant contribution. For many the discussion of texts by authors such as Héctor Azar and Carlos Martínez Assad (Mexico) and Benedicto Chuaqui, Edith Chahín or Roberto Sarah (Chile) will be entirely new ground. Cánovas places Bárbara Jacobs within his discussion of Arab authors in Mexico, though given her family background she also has been considered a Jewish writer. In his conclusion Cánovas covers such issues as “antisemitismo y turcofobia” and the common historical past of both groups as well as the similar contemporary stories of immigration and assimilation.

Voces judías en la literatura chilena, co-authored by Rodrigo Cánovas and Jorge Scherman Filer is the first book-length, comprehensive study of Jewish writing in Chile. The authors divide the book into three parts, beginning the volume with a chapter on the history of Jews in Latin America and Chile, which is useful for contextualizing the authors and works to be covered in the following chapters. The second part of the book more specifically contextualizes Jewish literature in Latin America. The essay “Letras judías en Chile: una mirada panorámica” thoroughly surveys the development of Jewish writing in the country. The third section, titled—somewhat poetically—“Voces mosaicas en Chile” takes the reader into more detailed analyses of specific texts grouped thematically under such labels as “Los primeros escritores judíos,” “Genealogías de la memoria,” “Cartografías mosaicas,” and “Voces femeninas.” Most likely new to many readers will be the discovery of writers such as Natalio Berman, Beinisch Peliowski, Rudi Haymann, Milan Platovsky, and Gertrudis de Moses. The concluding essay of the third section, “Un Justo de la era colonial,” is a curious component of the book in that it focuses on the literary representation of Francisco Maldonado da Silva (1592-1639), who was born in Tucumán, was the first practicing physician in Chile and who was killed in an *auto-de-fe* in Lima. The authors analyze the story of Maldonado da Silva as told in the historical fiction of the Chilean Guillermo Blanco (*Camisa limpia*, 1989) and Argentine Marcos Aguinis (*La gesta del marrano*, 1991). Cánovas and Scherman Filer have written a book that is informative, thorough, and sound in its observations and analyses. In sum, the long overdue *Voces judías en la literatura chilena* will serve as the standard reference work for the study of Chilean-Jewish letters.

Debora Cordeiro Rosa’s *Trauma, Memory and Identity in Five Jewish Novels from the Southern Cone*—obviously born out of a doctoral dissertation—also makes a significant

contribution to filling some gaps in the field. She examines five authors from the five Southern Cone countries (Teresa Porzecanski, Uruguay; Sonia Guralnik, Chile; Susana Gertopan, Paraguay; Francisco Dzialovsky, Brazil; and Marcelo Birmajer, Argentina). Porzecanski and Birmajer are the most widely known, yet to date their work has not garnered the kind of critical attention it deserves. This is much more the case for the prolifically productive Birmajer, which is curious, though one may postulate the reasons behind it. For the informed reader, Cordeiro Rosa's lengthy introductions on the history and immigration of Jews in Latin America may prove to be somewhat redundant. The author centers her discussion on the characters in Porzecanski's novel *Perfumes de Cartago*—the tale of a Sephardic family's immigration to and early years in Uruguay—with a particular focus on sexuality and gender issues among the women. The chapter on Sonia Guralnik's novel *Para siempre en mi memoria* examines the common themes of memory and trauma—indeed as the book title suggests this is the primary focus of the entire study. The time period is similar to that in Porzecanski's novel, and so there is discussion of immigration, assimilation and loss of identity. There has been scant criticism on Paraguayan author Susana Gertopan's trilogy of novels (*Barrio Palestina* [1998], *El nombre prestado* (2000), *El retorno de Eva* [2003]), or her three more recent novels. Cordeiro Rosa studies *Barrio Palestina* in the third chapter, another story of Jewish immigration in the early twentieth century. The story is not at all atypical, but the fact that the novel provides us a glimpse of the seldom told story of Jewish immigration to Paraguay is significant. This chapter and the following on Dzialovsky's *O Terceiro Testamento* are the most compelling of the volume. Dzialovsky's novel is complex and the author provides an excellent analysis of this text. As mentioned previously, Marcelo Birmajer's work has not received much critical attention to date and so to find the analysis of his novel *No tan distinto* is both welcome and much needed. While the previous four novels studied had in common the experience of immigration within roughly the same time period, Birmajer's novel is much more contemporary, though it shares with them the aspect of memory. Cordeiro Rosa adds to the discussion and debate on Jewish identity in Latin America with its multifaceted components and slippery boundaries. One may observe, however, that there is very little engagement by the author with the existing critical bibliography either on the authors studied or on Latin American-Jewish literature in general. Notwithstanding, her attention to the novels chosen adds to the growing bibliography in the field in critical areas.

Múltiples identidades: literatura judeo-latinoamericana de los siglos XX y XXI, edited by Verena Dolle, is a compilation of sixteen essays by a diverse group of authors. The essays are the result of a symposium held in November, 2009 at the Instituto Iberoamericano in Berlin. Following the introduction by Dolle, the volume opens with two essays by Argentine writers Alicia Steimberg and Ana María Shua. It is especially rewarding—even emotional—to read the essay by the late Alicia Steimberg whose work has been fundamental reading for decades. Apparent in Steimberg's essay is her characteristic sense of humor that always accompanied her illuminating intelligence. Shua, like Steimberg, writes on what it means to be (labeled) a "Jewish" writer, and like her fellow writer and friend, does so with a good deal of wit. The remaining essays are more academic in nature, and while space does not permit me to discuss each individually it is worth noting that all the essays are well-written, theoretically sound and, above all, interesting and informative. At the very least, a brief summary of the essays includes topics such as cultural magazines in Argentina, German-Jewish artists, Uruguayan theater, surveys of Jewish writers from Brazil, Mexico, and Chile, identity issues, Israel in the Latin American imagination, and four essays that focus on specific writers. Liliana Ruth Feierstein's essay on Jewish journals in Argentina (*Babel, Heredad, Judaica, Davke*) provides a cultural studies approach to such publications and their impact. There has been a certain tendency to insist on studying the literature of Alejandra Pizarnik (Argentina) and Clarice Lispector (Brazil)—both renowned authors—as Jewishly marked, in spite of the scarcity in either author's works of overt references to Jewish identity, religiosity, or culture. The essays here by Susanne Zepp (on Pizarnik) and Nelson Vieira (on Lispector) continue this tendency and add to the

debate on just how “Jewish” literature is to be defined and studied. Indeed, Zepps, essay focuses on language and makes little attempt to reveal a Jewish connection to Pizarnik’s writing. Vieira has written elsewhere at length on Lispector’s Jewishness, and so one finds here no significant addition to his work in this area. Regina Igel’s essay on the “new” generation of Jewish writers in Brazil is, in addition to engaging, highly useful in identifying up-and-coming Jewish writers with whom many may not have become acquainted yet; such as Leandro Sarmatz, Adriana Armony or Michel Melamed. In the same vein as Igel, Rodrigo Cánovas provides a brief survey of Jewish writers in Chile and Mexico (there will be nothing new here for those who read his books reviewed above). While there have been many studies on Margo Glantz’s famous *Las genealogías*, none has focused on the semiotics of the photographic images incorporated into the narrative. In this sense, Verena Dolle’s superb analysis is both innovative and enlightening in its approach. There has been scarce recent criticism on the work of Isaac Goldemberg, so Eduardo Hopkins Rodríguez’s exceptional essay on his novel *En el nombre del padre* is a notable addition to the bibliography. Collectively, this compilation of essays is a major addition to Latin American-Jewish Studies with something to offer the reader across a broad spectrum of topics and approaches.

Another recent collection of essays edited by Ran and Cahan—*Returning to Babel*—is the first volume in the newly established “Jewish Latin America” series of Brill, a major academic publisher in Jewish Studies. The series is edited by Raanan Rein, current co-president of the Latin American Jewish Studies Association. As the indicated by the title, this volume goes beyond addressing strictly literary topics. As a kind of Jewish Studies reader with a focus on Latin America, the thirteen essays cover such topics as history, education, literature, the arts, music, film, translation, and integration. For the purposes of this review, I will briefly discuss here only those that deal specifically with literature, though certainly the remaining essays are all admirable contributions to their disciplines. Sergio Waisman uses two novels by Sergio Chejfec as the axis for his essay on “The Jewish Latin American Writer and Tradition.” Edna Aizenberg is constantly challenging us to reexamine our reading of texts. In her essay “Should We Bury the Jewish Gaucho? A New Gerchunoff for the Twenty-First Century” she makes a convincing argument that it is time to move our focus away from Gerchunoff’s foundational *Los gauchos judíos* (1910) and consider his far more trenchant writings. For this purpose, she turns our attention to her own reading of Gerchunoff’s never-published collection of writings *La estrella de David*. Aizenberg’s conclusion calls for us to use this “late” Gerchunoff, this post-Holocaust Gerchunoff as a model for twenty-first-century Latin American Jewish studies. As previously stated, these books have made significant advances in filling critical voids. Joanna L. Mitchell’s essay does just that in discussing the novel of the relatively unknown Mexican author Ivonne Saed, *Triple crónica de un nombre*. She shows that the novel may be read as much more than just another novel of immigration. Another void is filled by Ariana Vigil’s discussion of Guatemalan-American author Francisco Goldman’s novel *The Divine Husband*. Finally, to round out the chapters on literature is an essay by Dayana Soto y Caballero de Galicia on Alicia Dujovne Ortiz’s novel *El árbol de la gitana*. Nelson Vieira also contributes here with another essay on Clarice Lispector. It is well worth mentioning that interest in Jewish film of Latin America is growing, as evidenced Tzi Tal’s contribution on “Jewish Puberty in Contemporary Latin American Cinema.”

Amalia Ran’s own *Made of Shores: Judeo-Argentinian Fiction Revisited* was published the year before the above edited volume. In *Made of Shores* Ran proposes both a rereading and a newly defined focus on Argentine-Jewish literature. By examining texts by writers as diverse as Andrés Neuman, Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, Gabriela Avigur-Rotem, Ricardo Feierstein, Sergio Chejfec, and Mario Szichman, Ran questions such important issues as identity and historicity, space and belonging. Her detailed and thought-provoking analyses of novels as well-known as Szichman’s *A las 20:25 la Señora entró en la inmortalidad* or as little-known as Argentine-Israeli writer Avigur-Rotem’s *Mozart lo haya yehudi* (Mozart Was Not a Jew) take us to new

territory and open exciting new avenues of inquiry. Likewise, her examination of Feierstein's *La logia del umbral* is a remarkable example of literary scholarship. Ran skillfully examines the transformation of how Jewish identity is perceived/conceived in Argentina and how the forces of diaspora, language, and history impinge on the formation of identity. Ran's *Made of Shores* joins the ranks of such standard works on Argentine-Jewish fiction as Leonardo Senkman's *La identidad judía en la literatura argentina* (1983), Naomi Lindstrom's *Jewish Issues in Argentine Literature* (1989), and Edna Aizenberg's *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires* (2002), with the distinction of bringing us full-force into the twenty-first century.

One of the continuing debates that all these books bring—once again—to the fore is the question of identity, and of naming. How do we speak of Latin American-Jewish literature and writers: With or without the hyphen? As a compound adjective, *judeomexicano* or Judeo-Argentinian?; In which order?; Which metaphors, bridge or border? Are Jews in or of/from Latin America? Clearly this debate on the tenuous vagaries of semantics will continue, for there is much at stake. Semantics aside—if for a moment—what these seven books demonstrate is that there is a tremendous amount of interest in Latin American-Jewish studies, with a real “boom” in literature and literary studies. The twenty-first century is indeed an exciting and stimulating time in the field and one looks forward to what the future may bring.

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Review Essay: Nación, estado y discurso literario. El siglo XX mexicano en la crítica del siglo XXI

Long, Ryan F. *Fictions of Totality. The Mexican Novel, 1968, and the National-Popular State.*

Indiana: Purdue UP, 2008. 210 pp. ISBN:-13: 978-1-55753-487-3.

Sánchez Prado, Ignacio M. *Naciones intelectuales. Las fundaciones de la modernidad literaria mexicana (1917-1959).* Indiana: Purdue UP, 2009. 307 pp. ISBN:-13: 978-1-55753-538-2.

No es casualidad que estas investigaciones sobre la relación entre la literatura y el estado mexicanos se hayan publicado hacia finales de la primera década del siglo XXI (y hayan visto la luz en la misma casa editorial). Incluso en la línea cronológica planteada —la modernidad en Sánchez Prado, específicamente entre 1917, año de la constitución de México, y la aparición de ensayos clave de Alfonso Reyes, y, en el caso de Long, el pivote de 1968 con paradas en los procesos pre y pos Tlatelolco—se advierte una continuidad de intereses, enfoques y problematizaciones que atañen a la manera en que diversos discursos literarios y culturales fueron conformando la idea de nación en sus múltiples acepciones, idea que ambos autores se encargan de desentrañar. Estos libros trazan así una especie de mapa que nos orienta hacia la intersección entre literatura, historia y política en el siglo XX mexicano.

El libro de Sánchez Prado es un verdadero *tour de force* que se convertirá en referencia ineludible para los especialistas en el campo. El autor basa su aparato crítico en el estudio de lo que considera diversas “naciones intelectuales” desplegadas principalmente en dos periodos de la historia mexicana: 1917-1930 y 1940-1950. Sánchez Prado concibe a la nación como una totalidad conflictiva y, dentro de ella, identifica a la literatura como un agente especialmente adecuado para proyectos contra-hegemónicos. Partiendo de conceptos de Pierre Bordieu en lo que atañe a la constitución del campo literario, enfoca la “historicidad y la genealogía de los textos” (8), y lo hace meticulosamente y con un excelente aparato de investigación y pensamiento detrás.

Es importante seguir el derrotero que el propio Sánchez Prado propone, puesto que va urdiendo un relato que necesita una línea de lectura secuencial. Así, el primer capítulo indaga en el papel de la literatura en esa comunidad imaginada llamada nación a principios de siglo XX en