

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

Senderovich, Sasha. *How the Soviet Jew Was Made*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2022. 352 pp. \$39.95 (9780674238190) HC.

There is much written on Jewish life in Czarist Russia, the USSR, and post-Soviet Russia and a significant community of scholars and researchers in North America, Europe, and Israel whose professional careers focus on this area. Sasha Senderovich, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Jackson School of International Studies, as well as an affiliate of the Stroum Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle, is a young scholar who has, seemingly, read most of this enormous body of work. Senderovich's new book, published in July 2022 by Harvard University Press, will give the persistent reader an extraordinary overview of the serious scholarly writing on the multiple dimensions of Jewish life in the Russian/Soviet space, with some reference, as well, to the post-Soviet space following.

The time frame taken on by Professor Senderovich for special focus begins with the dissolution of the Pale of Settlement in 1917 through the end of the 1930s, at which time the Soviet army occupied parts of Poland and the Baltic countries of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia — incorporating them into the USSR. His approach in the book's five chapters is to consider features of what he calls the “emergent Soviet Jew” in different geographic or thematic settings — sometimes combining the two. Each chapter is structured around a single text, event, or issue that links to other texts and contexts. The richly referenced links call upon sources largely in Yiddish and Russian, encompassing novels, short stories, journalism, film, and theater.

Through a close reading of texts and narrative, attentive not only to stated plot, but to the most subtle nuances and uses of language itself, Senderovich makes his case that “The Soviet Jew, on the move in the first two decades after the [Russian] revolution, comes into existence in spaces of encounter between the cultural attributes ascribed to the Pale of Settlement and the inchoate cultural space of Sovietness in the making.” Senderovich is at pains, through mining his many sources, to indicate the pulls toward and the resistances away from the new Soviet world in the making. “Before the Second World War, the Soviet Jew came into being within an idiosyncratic and culturally rich response to the Soviet state's attempts to reform Jews, like other non-Russian ethnic groups, into model Soviet citizens.”

In the Epilogue to his book, Senderovich underlines that “it is important to recognize that the Soviet Jew developed in response to one historical rupture and on the eve of another, which would

reshape it yet further.”

How the Soviet Jew Was Made is a volume particularly apt for the academic library. Readers may want to engage with the book in measured doses, taking the very detailed and densely written chapters one at a time. The reward for such reading will be an introduction to what for many will be a heretofore unknown world, and an opportunity to meet writers and observers in Yiddish and Russian sharing their reflections on a time of change and trauma, shot through, as well, with hopes for a transformed society.

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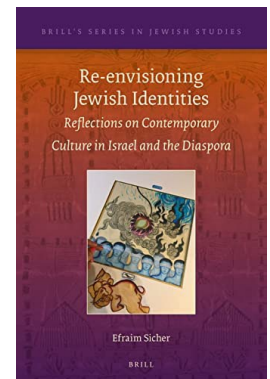
Sicher, Efraim. *Re-envisioning Jewish Identities: Reflections on Contemporary Culture in Israel and the Diaspora*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021. 242 pp. \$196.00 (9789004462243) HC.

Efraim Sicher, a professor of English and Comparative Literature at Ben Gurion University in Israel, approaches the infinitely complex issue of Jewish identity through the prism of literature and the arts. His book, bringing together chapters he has written and updated going back to 2013, does not here consider social science research on Jewish identity or, in a sustained and searching way, the writing and thinking of contemporary religious figures and professional philosophers.

For most readers encountering this book, author Sicher, coming from the specialized and rather esoteric world of literary criticism, opens the world of contemporary “post-modern” Jewish writers and artists engaged in various art forms including theater and the visual arts whose work touches, implicates, and addresses Jewish identity in multiple ways.

Sicher does a nice job in his introduction in situating what he is up to. He notes that “postmodern and postcolonialist discourse of diversity and hybridity dissolve all ethnic, sexual, religious and gender boundaries and make it difficult, if not undesirable, to fix any stable identities.” The mission Sicher takes on in this book, and in his reflections on what he has been interpreting and explicating over the years, is to meet “the challenge of deconstruction and fragmentation” of contemporary life. This is accomplished by examining clusters of texts and artworks (and the book does feature twenty illustrations) loosely organized around key issues at the center of debate today: nation, ethnicity, gender and sexuality religion, feminism, and the Holocaust.

The texts and images considered in the book, as Sicher observes, are indeed “provocative” and “disturbing” — and will be offensive and indecent to some — making this a volume that may not be at



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