



Lucille Cairns. *Francophone Jewish Writers Imagining Israel.* Contemporary French and Francophone Cultures Series. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016. 224 pp. \$120.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-78138-262-2.

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Israel in the Francophone Literary Imaginary

Lucille Cairns's *Francophone Jewish Writers Imagining Israel* charts the roles of affect and emotion in Francophone Jewish literary mediations of Israel between 1965 and 2012. Drawing on literary analysis, philosophy, and psychoanalysis, Cairns aims to produce a descriptive phenomenology of these mediations, and does so by examining forty-four French-language novels, memoirs, and autobiographies, together with thirteen interviews. The result is a valuable study that richly catalogues the emotional and cognitive diversity to be found in Francophone mediations of Israel, and while it is somewhat cautious in its argumentation, the book definitively evidences Israel's lasting emotional power in France. This work will be of most use to those interested in literary representations of Israel and scholars of emotion.

The significance of Cairns's work lies in its efforts to expose the role of emotion in French-language literary representations of Israel. Prior to 1967, France was Israel's most important international partner, furnishing the Jewish state with critical military and diplomatic aid. Though this relationship is often overlooked today, scholarship on the French-Israeli relationship and French perceptions of the Arab-Israeli conflict has proliferated over the last two decades, partly in response to reports of rising antisemitism in France. Cairns's research comes as part of this proliferation, and though she does not explicitly position herself among them, she joins a growing group of scholars within this movement who aim to re-

assess the role of emotion in the making and imagining of the French-Israeli relationship.

Yet it is not only antisemitism and the legacy of a forgotten friendship that frame this study. Cairns usefully reminds us that Israel is home to a Francophone community of some eight hundred thousand, while France itself boasts the largest Jewish community in Europe, a population of over six hundred thousand. She works to uncover the voices of these deeply interconnected communities, examining the works of both Francophone Jews domiciled in Israel and Jewish residents of France for whom Israel remains a central point of affect. Cairns sheds light on this heretofore overlooked language of mediation by turning to the world of literature, arguing that creative works stimulate the deepest of psychic responses and subsequently the richest of contributions to these Jewish imaginings of Israel (p. 1). In so doing, she provides the first book-length study on the subject, and the first systematic survey of French literary discourse on Israel.

While interdisciplinary in its approach, Cairns's text is at its essence a work of literary analysis, and will be most accessible to those familiar with the theories and methods of that discipline. The text itself is divided into eight chapters, including an introduction, six thematic chapters, and a supplement presenting interview data in place of a conclusion. Cairns begins her study with two chapters examining literary representations of Israeli identity, including characterizations of both its

foundational myths and contemporary paradigms. Using rich textual examples, these chapters tease out tropes of Messianism, the Holocaust, Zionism, and the body as they figure in literary mediations of Israeli identity. The heart of her text, however, are three chapters charting the literary mediation of intra-Israeli, Arab-Israeli, and Franco-Israeli conflict. Cairns exposes the enduring emotional power of conflict as a lens for understanding Israel, whether it be conflict between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, Israelis and Palestinians, or the acting out of the Arab-Israeli conflict in France (p. 236). A catchall chapter rounds out the work, usefully cataloging literary figurations of Jerusalem, the Hebrew language, and the liminal frontier while suggesting their affective power.

Each thematic chapter adheres to the same broad structure, and this accounts, in part, for one of the main pitfalls of the text. Cairns begins her chapters by providing a brief conceptual framework for the theme at hand, drawing variably on history, philosophy, sociology, and psychoanalysis. In their brevity, however, these sections tend to provide insufficient context to allow readers to fully apprehend the rich textual examples that follow. Often, this results in chapters that feel at once timeless and placeless, as writers' personal backgrounds are frequently left obscure, and the text jumps seamlessly between works published decades apart with minimal consideration for the passage of time and events.

This is, fortunately, not a uniform problem, and chapter 4's examination of literary mediations of the Arab-Israeli conflict productively grounds its discussion in a psychoanalysis of fear and the context of the Second Intifada. At other moments, however, one gets the impression that Cairns's corpus of evidence exists in a chronological and geographical vacuum. This is particularly apparent in chapter 1's analysis of the Holocaust and its variable figuration as a source of shame, political instrumentalization, and theological redemption. This discussion would be more illuminating if it were contextualized as part of a wider trend taking place within the French Jewish community. Communal leaders and voices in the Jewish press, such as the long-serving French Chief Rabbi Jacob Kaplan, had energetically used the Holocaust as a discursive lens for understanding Israel since the early 1950s, and integrating their voices would have done much to evidence the representativeness of Cairns's case studies. While her concluding "supplement" does help to contextualize the authors she examines by allowing interviewees to comment directly on their feelings toward Israel, these insights would have had greater value had they appeared earlier in the text.

The remainder of each thematic chapter is taken up with cataloging the diversity of affective literary discourse on Israel, and this seems to be both Cairns's methodology and chief analytical point. In her introduction, Cairns notes that "given the irreducibility of these multiple French-Jewish voices imagining Israel to single affective and/or cognitive idioms," the goal of her work "is to be helpfully introductory and expository," avoiding totalizing analyses in the hope that readers "will draw their own, informed conclusions" (pp. 10-11). In this, Cairns has been successful, but she has, perhaps, done her work too well. In demurring from a synthetic analysis, she provides her readers with a copious body of evidence, but only limited guidance for understanding its collective utility. This is deliberate, for Cairns concludes that the very diversity of the literary mediations she uncovers defies rational analysis; their diversity, itself, is the point. The interrelationship between literary texts is consequently left largely unexplored, even in the case of texts by the same author. The closest we can come to a synthesis, Cairns suggests, is by adopting the musicological lens of antiphony, "for it denotes a phenomenon of responsive singing or chanting not dissimilar to the common refrains found in these mediations" (p. 283). How readers respond to this approach will depend, I suspect, on their disciplinary proclivities. While Cairns has carefully documented *how* Israel was imagined, some readers will invariably wish that she had done more to explain *why* Israel was imagined in these ways, *when* it was. Meanwhile, in the absence of greater context, a reader's ability to draw their own conclusions will depend significantly on their preexisting familiarity with French and Israeli history and sociology.

These difficulties are made more poignant by the source base around which Cairns's work revolves. While her selection of forty-four primary texts provides a multifaceted entry point into the world of Francophone Jewish commentary on Israel, it is often unclear why these texts, in particular, were chosen for analysis. This seems an important question, as the texts themselves represent in actuality a sampling of just twenty-seven writers, while twenty-five of the forty-four texts examined were published within the last sixteen years. This is not in itself problematic, but it does raise questions about representativeness that the book could have done more to address. Cairns's study would also have benefited from better differentiating the multiple literary genres it examines, and from discussing whether they are being assessed in different ways.

Despite these concerns, Cairns has produced an in-

novative and thoughtful text that does much to make clear the ways in which Israel has been imagined within the world of Francophone Jewish literature. Beyond this overarching goal, Cairns also offers a number of secondary insights that merit particular attention. Her Francophone lens represents an important innovation in the study of Israel's figuration, in that it faithfully represents the transnational world of French-speaking Jews for whom Israel was both a site of politics and potential residence. Many of the authors Cairns examines are, or were at one point, permanently domiciled in Israel, and the text usefully reminds us that some 77 percent of French Jews have family in Israel. By adopting this analytical lens, she argues implicitly for the inclusion of Israel within the conception of *francophonie* (the French-speaking world), and in doing so, opens up heretofore unexplored vistas of comparative scholarship. Cairns provides a tropological baseline against which non-Jewish Francophone representations of Israel might be usefully contrasted, a comparison that would be particularly fruitful given the coolness of French-Israeli relations in recent years. Her work also contributes to the field of Israel studies by charting the mediation of Israeli identity within Israel's understudied Francophone minority, and by creating opportunities for comparison with Hebrew-language literature.

Cairns offers us an additional prism for assessing Israeli identity by adopting the theoretical lens of queering. She argues in chapter 3 that with queer theory increasingly expanding its ambit beyond sexuality and gender to embrace questions of race and ethnicity, conceptions of a fluid and unbounded Levantinism could be used as a conceptual tool to queer Israeli identity

(p. 104). Cairns suggests that queerness captures the difficulty of mapping discrete and stable identitarian categories onto some mediations of the Israeli, and develops her proposition by turning to the essayist and journalist Martine Gozlan. Gozlan's patronymic, the essayist explains, has the gift of ubiquity. Of Arab origin, like many names of Sephardic Jews ... it can be either Jewish or Muslim. This leads Gozlan to remark on the existence of her opposite number, a Palestinian journalist who shares her last name. Here, Cairns concludes, queerness reflects the conflation of normatively binary religious-political categories, and harkens to a Mediterranean Levantinism that erodes fixed national and cultural frontiers (p. 105). While Cairns notes that adopting the lens of queerness requires reading her sources against the grain, her insight into the application of queer theory usefully illustrates the potential fluidity of Israeli identity.

Cairns's *Francophone Jewish Writers Imagining Israel* is thus an important addition to a growing scholarship on the French-Israeli relationship, its figuration, and the role of emotion therein. At its best, the book is a timely and thoroughly detailed discussion of Francophone Jewish mediations of Israel, offering access and insights into a heretofore overlooked corpus of literature. In its weaker moments, the book loses sight of the forest for the sake of the trees, but this deliberate argumentative caution helps us to avoid generalizing syntheses, given the diverse mediations present in its source material. While some readers may wish Cairns had done more to account for this diversity and its significance, all will be able to appreciate Cairns's innovative approach to the transnational making and mediation of Jewish and Israeli identity.

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