

Maren Tova Linett, *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, first paperback edition 2010). 242pp. ISBN 978-0-521-18427-4.

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Maren Linett's study asks a key question for scholars of modernism: how should we respond 'when antisemitism stains the very feminist project we admire?' (59). In answering that question, Linett manages to bridge two camps sensitively, acknowledging both literary merit and prejudice. As *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness* makes apparent, in modernist texts Jewishness was often associated with femininity. As Miriam says to Michael in *Deadlock*, 'Nature's Salic Law would never be repealed' (III 216). In other words, the modernist woman would never be queen in a literary land ruled by modernist kings. Linett argues that female modernist writers 'see in their Jewish characters reflections of their own emotional pain and alienation from literary history' (2). But the figure of the Jew was not a simple foil for the writer's own plight. If on the one hand the Jew acted as a representation of marginalisation, on the other most of the writers 'accept cultural images of Jews bound up with biological, financial, patriarchal, and material forces – forces they wanted to exclude from their feminist modernism' (2).

What is common to all the writers discussed by Linett is that their Jewish characters are rarely English, but 'they cross more boundaries than those of national identity. They also fail to fit properly into categories of race, class, gender, and even religion.' (5). In her introduction, Linett convincingly locates the modernist woman as a counterpart to the available representations of Jewishness. But was it just female modernists who drew such parallels? Perhaps the greatest Jewish character in literary modernism is Joyce's Bloom. While Linett does acknowledge Bloom and Joyce's favourable treatment of this Jewish Everyman, and the less favourable representations in the work of other male writers such as Hemingway and Lawrence, her real concern is with more marginal Jewish characters. Representations of Jewishness in marginalised figures then demonstrate common concerns about

modernity such as: 'nervousness, alienation, the city, capitalism and/or communism' (6). Linett acknowledges the 'multipurpose tool' of Jewishness in modernism, making the amusing analogy of a 'Leatherman or Swiss Army knife if you will' (188). Yet, the gender of the author does seem to make a difference. The 'men of 1914' deployed Jewish characters as useful tools for self-exploration or aesthetic concerns, whereas for the women writers, the Jew aids a disinterested sphere which allowed them to write and to overcome their anxiety about 'their right to write' (11).

Linett concentrates on the work of Djuna Barnes, Jean Rhys, Dorothy Richardson, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Virginia Woolf. Chapter 1 acknowledges the pervasive image of the 'money hungry Jew' in Rhys', Townsend Warner's and Woolf's work. Chapter 2 looks at Richardson, while Chapter 3 returns to the relationship between Jewishness and modernity in the work of Woolf and Townsend Warner. Chapter 4 takes a more thematic approach to *Pilgrimage*. In Chapter 5, Barnes' *Nightwood* and Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight* serve as appropriate texts for the exploration of ideas about time, trauma and Jewishness. Naturally, for the readers of this journal the two chapters on Dorothy Richardson will be of most interest.

Chapter 2 considers Miriam's journey as a pilgrimage during which Judaism and Quakerism have to be superseded. Perhaps the least convincing chapter in the book, Linett explores Miriam's spiritual quest throughout *Pilgrimage* which, in her reading, culminates in a revelation about the fulfilment and possibilities Christianity offers over and above other religions. The last two 'chapter-volumes' of *Pilgrimage* provide the basis for this reading. According to Linett, Miriam becomes transfixed by Quakerism, but then moves on, as her Christian life 'cannot be circumscribed within a single denomination'. The character of Jean in *March Moonlight* provides Miriam with a religious idol and the 'conduit for God's love' (71). In this context, Jewishness was an obstacle which she had to overcome in order to continue her journey. Michael as *Pilgrimage's* figurehead of Judaism/Jewishness is representative of the 'old', of an ancient religion, based on calculation and patriarchy, whereas Quakerism offers the silence which Miriam continually seeks yet is

insufficient in other aspects. In ‘overcoming’ both these ‘obstacles’, it allows Miriam to find the new feminist spirituality represented by Jean. ‘Christianity’, she writes, ‘supersedes Judaism in *Pilgrimage* by replacing its focus on surfaces (the letter of the law) with insight into deeper meanings; its patriarchal strictures with an awareness of women’s full humanity’ (76). This allows Linett a new interpretation of the ending of *March Moonlight*. She reads Paul Shatov as the realisation of Miriam’s Christianity: Michael and Amabel’s child releases Miriam from the ‘burdens of the flesh’, promising ‘transcendence of the letter, of gender, and of the body’ (78). This is an original interpretation, although some might feel that Linett places too much emphasis on Miriam’s Christian awakening and that her interpretation ties up the ends of what is an unfinished sequence a little too neatly. Thus: ‘In Christianity, [Miriam] believes, one can overcome not only race and social status, but the stark sex-gender system against which she has fought throughout the thirteen novel-chapters of *Pilgrimage*’ (76).

Chapter 4, ‘*The race must go on: gender, Jewishness, and racial continuity in Barnes and Richardson*’ explores further how Michael is a ‘potential trap for the individualist, feminist protagonist to evade’ (72). The argument is reinforced with a liberal scattering of supporting sources and theories from Paul of Tarsus to Sander Gilman. Using Christian theological discourse, Linett suggests a dichotomy between Christianity and Judaism, where Christianity is associated with the spirit and Judaism with the body – a dualism which, of course, has a parallel in discourses of masculinity and femininity. Drawing on Paul of Tarsus’ theory that there is a ‘Christian tradition that associated Jews with bodiliness, materiality, and biology’ (112), it is no wonder that Linett argues that *Pilgrimage*’s feminist protagonist would be bound to shy away from such associations. Therefore, the ‘trap’ that Jews threaten in feminist novels is the trap of biology, of an association of the self with the body.

Interestingly, the escape from the trap of embodiment can be found in lesbian relationships. Although similar kinds of sexism can be found in other men in *Pilgrimage*, Michael’s admiration for the continuity of ‘race’, his yearning to have children, his

chauvinistic views about women, and his 'desire for traditional family life [are] linked explicitly to his Jewishness' (119). Linett's reading convincingly attaches Michael's view of the procreative 'Woman' with the view of femininity that Miriam herself so openly dislikes. It is therefore to escape 'biological determinism' that Miriam moves to a nonprocreative relationship with Amabel, although she soon finds Amabel's fluidity as unbearable and stifling as Michael's fixedness. And it is to escape them both, Linett contends, that Miriam introduces Amabel to Michael, 'confident that his biological drive will overcome his resistance to Amabel's charms' and believing that it is his Jewishness that causes him to see women as interchangeable: 'to see women as vessels for racial continuity' (123). Linett summarises the end result of this love triangle as: 'retroactively validated when we see Amabel's fluid charms and multiple identities constricted by a new, more acceptable configuration of the categories of race, gender, and sexuality'. Had Miriam married Michael, she like Amabel would have been tethered by the 'domesticating force of Jewishness' (131). Linett also adds to her earlier assertion and contends that Miriam's content at holding Amabel's and Michael's baby in the closing pages of *March Moonlight* is a way of relieving 'some anxiety about the fact that Miriam has found spiritually and emotionally fulfilling love with another woman [Jean]'; and although Miriam finds 'freedom', 'the text demonstrates its allegiance to heteronormativity in its final scene' (132).

What is most interesting about this chapter is that Linett plots Richardson's own burgeoning awareness of the devastating effect of antisemitism in the 1930s onto her representation of Michael and Miriam's relationship with him. This is seen in Miriam's refusal of Michael's second marriage proposal in *Clear Horizon* which is quite different from her initial, ambiguous refusal that drew upon gender differences. Her later rejection is more forthright and the reason is racial identity. Yet, in the novel race, sexuality and gender are difficult to disentangle when it come to Jewishness. Jewish masculinity at once too masculine, 'arrogant, sexist, insisting that women serve as means to their own biological continuation', and paradoxically too feminine, 'gentle, small, and willing to accept a role as tools of biology' (139). In fact, Linett concludes, this

contradictory representation of the Jew enables modernist women writers to explore, negotiate and even reduce their anxiety about their own gender and sexuality.

In the final chapter which considers the metatextual use of Jewishness, Linett argues: 'Richardson's modernism privileges particularity, interiority, and instability over summaries, facts and linearity' (177) and that her sympathetic portrayal of Michael actually 'stands for the very generality and definitiveness that *Pilgrimage* works against' (178); ultimately it is through Miriam's association with Michael (and Richardson's with 'Michael's original', Benjamin Grad) that she – Miriam/Richardson – is able to 'define her artistic goals' (176), find self-realisation and develop her own feminist modernism.

Yet in a way this returns us to the question with which we began. How can we value the feminist modernist projects when they are so marred by bigoted rhetoric? Ultimately, Linett suggests that if we focus solely on this negative aspect then 'we will dismiss out of hand Woolf's call for mental freedom or Richardson's liberating feminist aesthetic'. What the dutiful modernist scholar must do 'is refrain from celebrating these projects in sweeping terms, thereby implicitly endorsing the aspects of their projects built upon supersessionism and antisemitism. We must see clearly the flaws at the center of some of the most inspiring feminist literary projects' (79).