

Ira Bruce Nadel. *Jewish Writers of North America: A Guide to Information Sources*. American Studies Information Guide Series, Vol. 8. (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1981) xix, 493 pp., \$38.00.

This is an extensive bibliography covering selected American and Canadian Jewish authors, both contemporary and historical. The book is separated into four major sections: General Reference Guides (bibliographies, literary histories, anthologies, etc.), Poets, Novelists and Short-Story Writers, and Dramatists. Each of the last three sections is divided into two parts: American-Jewish and Canadian-Jewish authors. Concluding the volume are two appendixes—Yiddish Literature, and Checklists of Additional American and Canadian-Jewish Writers—plus the usual author, title, and subject indexes.

The book is certainly a satisfactory resource for the undergraduate and graduate student who needs a basic reference work but not necessarily a comprehensive compilation. The forty pages of general reference guides are quite useful as a first step toward surveying the whole field of Jewish-North American writing. The selections made are sensible and contain over one-hundred standard reference volumes. The authors included in the bibliographies of individual writers are in the main fairly standard and range from literary superstars, e.g., Bellow and Malamud, to such popularizers as Herman Wouk and Edna Ferber. One can always argue choices; to reject Nelson Algren but include Wouk seems indefensible. This is particularly grievous when the editor states the choice is based on “literary excellence, cultural significance and historical importance.” The Checklist on Yiddish Literature should be helpful to those interested in the scholarly examination of a field now emerging from its earlier underrated position, thanks to the excitement generated by Isaac Bashevis Singer’s achievements. Appendix B (Checklists of Additional American and Canadian-Jewish Writers) is simply an alphabetical listing of names of authors who happen to be Jews without any factual or interpretative comment.

In his four-page introduction, Ira Nadel traces the basic problem of the ethnic writer, i.e., assimilation vs. tradition, as it affects the North American Jew, developing a four-phase historical approach leading from the initial generation’s religious orthodoxy through successive stages of cultural accommodation. This pattern leads to a central tension in ethnic writing, that of defining what is gained and what is lost in the exchange. Usually, the sensitive artist argues that the religious idealism is corrupted by the pervasive materialism of a wasteful society. It is possible, perhaps, that most serious Jewish-American writing is centered on this dilemma with virtually the entire body of work produced by Bellow, Malamud, and Roth, among others, serving as illustrative evidence.

Nadel also comments on differences between American and Canadian Jewish literature. He argues that they both are parallel in theme but that the Canadians are roughly a generation behind the Americans, primarily because of their “newer presence” and their relative unwillingness to give up their Jewish heritage which is perpetuated through an even more tightly woven ghettoization than that experienced by their American counterparts.

The work is a valuable tool for non-scholars in the field of Jewish-American literature and could serve also as a basic volume for the library of the scholar whose major field is the Canadian-Jewish writer.

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