

THE FAR EAST – THE MIDDLE EAST. ISRAEL’S PRESENCE IN FRANCOPHONE LITERATURE

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The University of Augsburg hosted, in late 2008, the sixth edition of the Francophone and Roman Studies Researchers’ Congress (Frankoromanistentag). Following the workshop conducted on this occasion and dedicated to the relations between France, the francophone space and Israel, from the perspective of literature, philosophy and history of ideas, appeared three years later the volume entitled *The Far East – The Middle East, Israel’s Presence in Francophone Literature*, bringing together studies signed by researchers from Germany, Israel, France, Austria, Portugal, Brazil and the United States.

The heterogeneity of the authors’ thinking, coming from different geographical areas, but also with different mentalities and different cultural mindsets, leads, naturally, to different approaches of the proposed issue. However, all the studies converge towards the idea of the Jewish particular collective identity, an inconsistent people whose contribution to the francophone culture, and also to the global one, cannot be denied, but which, however, is always compelled to review its place and condition in the world.

In this respect, the editors quote a Jewish writer, philosopher and filmmaker, Romanian-born and later of French expression, Benjamin Fundoianu / Benjamin Fondane, who signed, during the preamble of the Second World War, an essay entitled *Utopia and Territory*, which stands out through its capacity to capture the antinomy from the essence of Judaism: “An inconsistent nation. We are attributed the lowest materialism and Judaism is the moral’s history, the idealism’s history. A contradiction that may very well be the foundation of our existence. It is our very existence. On one hand, leaning towards the laws and the abstract ideas; on the other hand, the strong and mature instinct. On one hand, the moral elevation, the beautiful spirit; on the other hand, the desire to live firmly. On one hand, light; on the other hand, dust. What a beautiful life – creating contradiction!”¹

The central idea of the essay makes a synthesis between pragmatism and idealism, “to overcome the antagonisms attributed to the Jewish nature”.² Moreover, the editors have chosen to fully replicate, in the preamble of the studies selected in the volume, the text *The Seen Palestine*, signed by Benjamin Fundoianu, in the Romanian stage of his creation, and published in the Zionist paper, *Mântuirea*, from the 26th of March, 1919, in Bucharest.

Several studies focus the activity and cultural positioning of the Jewish scholars in different Francophone countries. Carmen Oszi, a Romanian – born Israeli researcher, offers an approach to the issue of Zionist debates in the Jewish press in Romania, with a case study on the relation to Benjamin Fondane to this subject.

Dominique Guedj devotes her study to analyzing the way in which the vision of Judaism appears in Benjamin Fondane’s texts from his youth.

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Monique Jutrin addresses two different subjects: on the one hand, the Jewish French speaking poets, on the other hand, the life and philosophical work of Rachel Bepaloff. Born in Pasmanik, to a Jewish family from Ukraine, she develops a philosophical system based on the idea of liberty and tragedy, her thinking fitting the first existentialist wave. The work of the same philosopher is also analyzed by the researcher Maria Villela Petit, in terms of its conceptual positioning between Athens and Jerusalem.

A comprehensive study aims at the Sephardic literature from Québec and is signed by Mechtild Gilzmer. The text is centered around the idea of identity regrouping, based on the principle of a literary specificity, determined by Hebraism and materialized in the exile space in Québec.

The Jewish identity in Albert Memmi's Romanian universe, a Jewish writer of Tunisian origin, is detailed in Alfred Strasser's text. The assimilation of the values of the dominant society and the auto – integration in its ranks, are perceived by the writer as means to redefine one's identity, but, as is shown by reading his novels, are destined to fail.

Remaining in the literary space, we point out the subject tackled by the researcher Saskia S. Wiedner, namely the new generation of Jewish writers, illustrated by the Israel's image in Marc Weizmann's novels.

Diane Haußmann's study tries to offer an answer to the question whether one can live in Israel without developing a political conscience, starting from the world famous novel signed by Yasmina Khadra (a female pseudonym of the Algerian writer and soldier Mohammed Moulessehoul), *The Attack*.

The book also brings together two other studies dedicated to the works of Simone Weil and Gustave Kahn, signed by Ricardo Nirenberg and Ulrike Eisenhut.

We cannot omit from this brief overview of the novel, professor Till R. Kuhnle's study, entitled *Israel – The Splinter in the Flesh*, which raises the question of redefining the Jewish identity and the Jew's relations with Israel.

Overall, the book is well balanced, and the message is open both to specialists from the literary or philosophic field, as well as to readers that enjoy specialty lectures. The freshness of the topics, as well as the applicability of the proposed theme make possible for this volume to be registered in the essential bibliography of the field, answering to some fundamental questions but, at the same time, proposing new directions of thought for the specialists.

References

¹ Fundoianu, B., *Judaism și elenism* (București: Hasefer, 1999), 36 (my translation).

² Șerban, G., "Istorie zămislită din nou", *Realitatea evreiască*, 72/872 (1998): 2 (my translation).