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Review:

Hidden in Plain Sight: Jews and Jewishness in British Film, Television, and Popular Culture, ed. Nathan Abrams

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Hidden in Plain Sight: Jews and Jewishness in British Film, Television, and Popular Culture, ed. Nathan Abrams (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016), ISBN 978-0-8101-3283-2, pp. 296, \$99.95.

The title of this book alludes to the fact that, according to its editor Nathan Abrams and many of the authors assembled in the volume, Jews in Britain have historically avoided highlighting their ethnicity or religion in favour of an assimilationist “British” identity. Moreover, Abrams argues, the role of Jews and the topic of Jewishness in British popular culture has been equally “hidden” in the realm of scholarly writing. As an American scholar who has worked in the field of Jews and the cinema but knew little of the British context, I was surprised to learn that research on this topic has not approached the prominence that it has in the US. Focusing on contemporary film (silent and sound) and television and touching, to a lesser degree, on literature and theatre, the twelve contributions assembled in this volume do much to fill this gap.

A significant number of prominent individuals involved with the British film industry were, in fact, Jewish. In the early days of cinema, many professional fields in Britain were closed to Jews; thus, it is not surprising that some of the “pioneers” of the industry were Jewish, since it offered them an arena for advancement (the producer George Berthold Samuelson is a case in point). But many famous individuals of later periods were Jewish too, a fact that is not well known but establishes a continuity with the prominent role of Jews in other national film industries, especially that of the US. Relevant figures include the producer Michael Balcon, the director-producers Alexander Korda and Emeric Pressburger, the directors Mike Leigh and John Schlesinger, and the actors Peter Sellers and Laurence Harvey.

The contributions to the volume range widely in subject matter, presenting a broad overview of the topic. Gil Tofell examines the British adaptation of *Jud Süß*, the novel by the Jewish author Lion Feuchtwanger which Veit Harlan cannibalized for his infamous Nazi-era film adaptation. Phyllis Lassner and Alexis Pogorelskin discuss an American film, *The Mortal Storm* (1940), which was scripted by a British writer depicting the plight of European Jews under the Nazi regime (all while refusing to use the word “Jew”). Lawrence Baron investigates *Mr. Emmanuel* (1944), the only film about Nazi antisemitism produced in wartime Britain. In his fascinating

rereading of *Peeping Tom* (1960), Michael Berkowitz foregrounds the Jewishness of its screenwriter Leo Marks and the role of Jews in the fields of photography, colour film, and pornography. Turning to television, Gavin Schaffer and Rachel Garfield take on Jewish-themed sitcoms of the 1960s, and the 1970s and the beginning of the current decade, respectively. Donald Weber compares Mike Leigh's "Jewish Play" *Two Thousand Years* (2005) to his film *Secrets and Lies* (1996) which, he argues, is more "Jewish" than the play, even though it does not overtly deal with Jews. Claudia Sternberg explores two comedies dealing with the divergence of cultural upbringing and biological descent. In *Leon the Pig Farmer*, a young Jew discovers that he is the product of an artificial insemination mishap involving a non-Jewish Yorkshire pig farmer; in *The Infidel*, a young Muslim discovers that he was adopted and his birth parents were Jews. While many of the films discussed focus on male Jewish characters, the protagonist of the film *Suzie Gold* (2004), analysed by Michele Byers, is a woman who must decide whether to marry a Jew or a non-Jew. Intermarriage also features prominently in one of the two television series (*Hebburn* and *Friday Night Dinner*) which Sue Vice examines, focusing against the backdrop of "the conundrum of Jewish particularity in the face of a homogenizing Britishness in the twenty-first century" (p. 247) on what has traditionally been referred to as the "emancipation contract". Finally, Nir Cohen, focusing on the television epic *The Promise* (2011), takes on the topic of Israeli–Palestinian relations.

A number of overarching themes emerge from the twelve essays: the fear felt by British Jews that underscoring Jewishness would lead to more antisemitism; the role of the experience of the Second World War in the formation of British Jewish consciousness; the nature (and circulation) of Jewish stereotypes in Britain; the role of European Jewish émigrés in the British cultural scene; generational and class distinctions within Jewish identity; the contrasting reception of Jewish-themed productions by the Jewish and non-Jewish press; how films and television shows about Jews and antisemitism paved the way (and served as test cases) for subsequent endeavours dealing with other British minorities (blacks and Asians); and the controversial nature (given Britain's historic role in Palestine) of works engaging contemporary Israeli politics.

The essays are all thoroughly researched, well written, and jargon-free, making the volume suitable for both an academic and an interested general audience. In sum, *Hidden in Plain Sight* is an excellent anthology that will help fill the void of scholarly work on the topic of Jews in

contemporary British film and television and contribute to study of the subject on an international level as well.

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