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Sara R. Horowitz, Amira Bojadzija-Dan, and Julia Creet, eds. *Shadows in the City of Light: Paris in Postwar French Jewish Writing*. SUNY Series in Contemporary Jewish Literature and Culture. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021. xiv + 264 pp. Notes, bibliography, index, and illustrations. \$95.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781438481739.

Review by Julia Elsky, Loyola University Chicago.

The collected volume *Shadows in the City of Light* positions Paris as “a fulcrum between cultures, between memory and forgetting, between history and place” (p. 3). The book focuses on Paris as the destination for so many Jewish immigrants in the interwar period; by 1940, of approximately 330,000 Jews in France, 140,000 were immigrants without French citizenship and 55,000 were naturalized.[1] These immigrants largely settled in Paris, where, as this book argues, writers negotiated their Jewishness and Frenchness. In fact, the book is largely about Jewish immigrant writing: its extremely cohesive chapters primarily deal with the authors Sarah Kofman, Patrick Modiano, Georges Perec, and Henri Raczymow, although other writers like Irène Némirovsky and Abraham Sutzkever are also treated. As argued in the introduction, Paris is not just the setting of their novels—rather their treatment of the city itself brings up questions about Jewish and national identity as well as about memory of the war. The introduction lays out the above arguments of the book and provides a useful history of Jews in Paris and of the Occupation in Paris.

The first part of the book, “Topography,” is devoted to the cityscape of Paris and authors’ depictions of memory and forgetting, absence and presence, through the city itself. In her chapter on Modiano’s *Dora Bruder*, Julia Creet traces Modiano’s path in tracing Dora Bruder through the use of maps. Creet refers to the “very common impulse to plot the places Modiano describes” (p. 35)—a reading practice underscored by the popularity of Phillip Azoury and Joseph Ghosn’s Google Map project. By superimposing transparencies of multiple maps to plot place, time, memory, and emotions in the novel, Creet shows the “unreadable solidity” (p. 40) of the cityscape in what becomes an illegible “palimpsest” (p. 38). This concrete unreadability is central to the anxieties about memory itself in the novel. In his essay, Gary D. Mole argues that Kofman’s “dangerous plunge into her past” in *Rue Ordener Rue Labat* is “less temporal than spatial” (p. 56). The text is so insistent on and structured around geography that Mole calls Kofman’s mapping of the places of Paris a “textual *duty of memory*” (p. 53). In the final chapter of the section, Annelies Schulte Nordholt compares Raczymow’s imaginary walking in Belleville of the past to Perec’s obsessive walking, including on the rue Vilin (an evocative name) where he was born but does not recognize. Both authors reveal a paradox: they write about absences and forgetting in the wake of the Shoah, and yet the space of the city is “intensely present” with “a definite fullness” (p.

60). This section relates what we can and cannot see in Paris—and often *not seeing* plays a central narrative function in postwar Jewish writing about Paris and memory of the Shoah.

Part two, “Familiar Strangers,” juxtaposes two essays on the role immigration plays for writers of the city of Paris. Nadia Malinovich compares literature by Eastern European Jewish immigrants from 1905-1932 to Sephardic literature of the 1950s and 1960s. Writers like Bernard Lecache, André Billy, and Moïse Twersky portray the promises of French universalism as well as their protagonists’ conflicts about reconciling Frenchness and Jewishness. Malinovich finds parallels in terms of promises and disillusionment about Paris in postwar Sephardic writing, including by authors Katia Rubenstein and Jean-Luc Allouche. But, as Malinovich argues, the interwar authors’ conflicts pertain to Frenchness and Jewishness, while the North African authors relate to Frenchness and North African identities. In his original contribution to the volume, Henri Raczymow, in Phyllis Aronoff’s translation, discusses his “memory shot through with holes” alongside Kofman’s “belated memory” (Froma Zeitlin’s term), [2] writing from the point of view of the child of survivors and from the point of view of a grandchild of Eastern European immigrants to Paris (p. 88). Reflecting on the drive to write the names of the streets where he spent his childhood (as Kofman and Perec also do), he concludes that the practice is “a way of connecting one’s memory to something solid and objective” in the face of so much loss (p. 97). The essays in this second part of *Shadows in the City of Light* in particular underscore the central argument of the book: as Raczymow states—revising Josephine Baker’s famous line “I have two loves, my country and Paris”—“I have only one country, and it is Paris” (p. 98).

Chapters in the third part of volume (“Ambivalences”) analyze the ways in which writing the past of Paris actually reveals absences (especially familial ones) in the city. What Raczymow calls “something solid and objective”—the streets, the metro stations—can also be seen as sites of a haunting absence. Amira Bojadzija-Dan discusses how Modiano and Perec “meet at the junction of absence and silence of postwar Paris” (p. 106). In providing an overview of the places in Perec’s and Modiano’s works, Bojadzija-Dan shows that for both authors Paris is a site of the search for understanding family histories and the space through which they recover their Jewishness. In his chapter on *Dora Bruder*, Maxime Decout poses the question of why Modiano never states clearly the Jewishness of his characters. By plotting the “hollow imprint” of Dora Bruder on Paris, Modiano comes to reveal the unreachability of his father’s experience of the war as a Jewish person (p. 121). As such, Decout argues that Jewishness for Modiano “reveals the part of emptiness that is proper to human beings but is too frequently masked and forgotten because it is too disquieting” (p. 121). Finally, Ruth Malka also tackles the impossibility of writing family histories under the Occupation for both Modiano and Perec. While Perec focuses on the inability to remember, Modiano, a member of the second generation, turns to fiction and a “haunting imaginary memory” (p. 125). Although Perec and Modiano are from different generations, they both write about absences in the spaces of Paris to cope with the trauma of war—for Perec the unspeakable nature of the Shoah and for Modiano the unknowability of his father’s past.

The final two parts of the book (“Absence” and “Past Imperfect”) both focus on memory and history. L. Scott Lerner studies Kofman, Modiano, and Perec through the lens of the Holocaust memoir, arguing that the work done in these texts is not a discovery but rather becomes the very “work of mourning” (p. 151). The question of how—by what narrative means—Jewish immigrant writers (or children of immigrants) from Eastern Europe depict Paris, at once a symbol of universalism as well as the locus of repressed memory of the war, is the topic of Thomas Nolden’s chapter. Sarah Hammerschlag makes the important point that the formative years of the authors

treated in *Shadows in the City of Light* were during the Algerian conflict. The allusions to Algeria, and also the many times in which the conflict is not explicitly mentioned, are crucial in their texts about Paris. Drawing on Michael Rothberg's notion of multidirectional memory, [3] Hammerschlag shows that the "spatialization of memory" (p. 177) "allows for the inflection of the colonial conflict onto France's World War II involvement" (p. 180).

In part four, Nelly Wolf's chapter on Perec argues that when Perec depicts postwar Paris, he is actually showing wartime Paris. For example, in *Les Choses*, typically read as a sociological novel about the 1960s that includes explicit discussion of decolonization, depictions of the emptiness of Paris turn the city "insidiously into a frightful place haunted by memories of war" (p. 197). Sara R. Horowitz studies Paris as a hub for postwar Yiddish writing. Focusing largely on the poet Abraham Sutzkever, she theorizes a postwar Jewish flaneur for whom "movement through Parisian space reveals the poet's own dislocation and disillusion" (p. 207). In contrast, Horowitz discusses the anti-flaneur in postwar Jewish imagination of walking in Occupied Paris—in texts by Kofman and Modiano—who "walks the streets fearfully or not at all" (p. 208). Finally, Susan Rubin Suleiman focuses on the postwar history of the discovery and publication of Némirovsky's *Suite française*. As Suleiman states, "the postwar Jewish memory of Paris in this novel is found on the side of readers rather than the writer" (p. 223). Discovered by her daughters, the unfinished novel was first published in 1957 to little critical attention. As Suleiman traces this history of the book, she shows the vast differences in reception and memory of the war in 1957 and in 2004, when the book became a bestseller. The final section of *Shadows in the City of Light* deftly shows the "unfinished business" of memory and the war in the postwar period (p. 189).

This collected volume is an excellent source for anyone interested in the authors discussed, representations of the city, Jewish immigrant writing in France, and postwar memory. The result of an international symposium in 2016 at York University, the essays together compile and build upon a critical vocabulary of memory: the Vichy syndrome (Henry Rousso), multidirectional memory (Michael Rothberg), postmemory (Marianne Hirsch), memory of the 1.5 generation (Susan Rubin Suleiman) or the "liminal generation" (Steven Jaron), belated memory (Froma Zeitlin), *raumgewordene Vergangenheit* [past turned into space] (Walter Benjamin), among others. Another line of thought that runs throughout the book is the reconsideration of the figure of the flaneur, drawing on the thought of Michel de Certeau, Guy Debord, and Walter Benjamin.

That Perec and Modiano, two of the central authors in *Shadows in the City of Light*, themselves made physical marks on Paris long after the postwar period testifies to the long-lasting preoccupation with Paris and memory of the war. As contributors to the volume note, rue Georges-Perec in the twentieth arrondissement was inaugurated in 1994 and the Promenade Dora Bruder was established in 2015 in the eighteenth arrondissement. Further afield, Place Irène Némirovsky received its name in 2005 in Issy-l'Évêque, the town to which Némirovsky fled Paris during the war—pointing to another displacement and absence.

## NOTES

[1] Jean-Jacques Becker and Annette Wieviorka, eds., *Les Juifs de France: De la Révolution française à nos jours* (Paris: Liana Levi, 1998), 108.

[2] Froma Zeitlin, "The Vicarious Witness: Belated Memory and Authorial Presence in Recent Holocaust Literature" *History and Memory* 10:2 (Fall 1998): 5-42.

[3] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

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