

expert hands they produce a 'composite, bifold story of recognition' (p. 83) that forces us to read these texts in new and exciting ways.

In the last of his case studies, Newton turns to what he calls the 'imagining of otherness' (p. 111), that is, Black attempts to imagine Jews, and vice versa. In many ways, this has proved a flawed project. As Newton points out, in Bernard Malamud's case it has tended to result in the reiteration of a specific (negative) allegory of otherness: 'Jews approach; Blacks demur' (p. 123). On the other hand, Newton sees in John Edgar Wideman's short stories a very different aesthetic at work; a form of literary crosshatching that imagines a shared public space between Blacks and Jews. Such empathetic stances find an echo in the forms of 'displacement' (or 'borrowings') that Newton discusses in his final chapter on David Mamet's *Homicide* and the O. J. Simpson trial. But, in truth, the glib analogies that Johnnie Cochran drew in the Simpson trial between racist invective and National Socialist ideology do no-one any good. If anything, they have tended to encourage a culture of victimhood in the United States that has temporarily soured Black-Jewish relations, a point that Newton himself alludes to, if only in passing.

Facing Black and Jew is a demanding book that assumes not only a knowledge of twentieth-century Jewish-American and African-American fiction but also a familiarity with Emmanuel Levinas's ethical philosophy and Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory. Non-specialists, in particular, may find this off-putting. Another obstacle (at least for this reviewer) is Newton's penchant for infelicities like 'surplusive', 'sensationalistically', 'lexicalization', and 'inconsequentialize'. Nevertheless, this is an absorbing and highly intelligent work that asks us to view African-American and Jewish-American cultures in such a way that 'their contact with one another is genuinely a matter of enlightenment, of discovery not performance' (p. 167).

University of Southampton

J. R. OLDFIELD

HOUMAN SARSHAR (ed.), *Esther's Children: A Portrait of Iranian Jews*. The Center for Iranian Jewish Oral History, Beverly Hills, CA, 2002. xxii, 457 pp. \$110.00. ISBN 0827607512.

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran, nearly sixty per cent of the Jewish community there has emigrated and those remaining are in difficult straits. The cultural heritage of this large Diaspora community was slowly but surely fading away. The present work, a collection of twenty-five articles on the history of the Jews of Iran from biblical times until the end of the twentieth century, seeks to introduce this ancient community to a readership that will extend beyond the intimate circle of Judeo-Persian scholars and also to preserve the history, culture and traditions of this dwindling Diaspora community.

Of the twenty-five articles, six are historical essays that examine the status of the Jews from ancient times until the advent of the Islamic Republic. The other nineteen focus on a variety of cultural and social issues pertinent to each of the historical periods included, and especially on the twentieth century. The book concludes with a comprehensive bibliography of Judeo-Persian scholarship published to date in English, French, German, Hebrew and Persian. While the articles are without footnotes and bibliographic references, and at best can be described as 'scholarship with an agenda', the large amount of material on the twentieth century, particularly on social and cultural history, will probably be unfamiliar to a good many scholars of Jewish Studies, and might well serve as background reference reading, and the bibliography at the end is excellent. This being the case, a short review would seem to be in order.

One cannot expect in a volume such as this that all the contributions will be at the same level of scholarship, even when dealing with 'popular-level' scholarship. Anyone seeking information on ancient Persian Jewry, be it the Achaemenid period, the Sasanian Empire or the Babylonian Talmud, for instance, would do well to look elsewhere.¹ The same is true for the Middle Ages, since just one article, dealing only with Jewish–Muslim interaction, has been included and much here will be known from general surveys.²

The axis upon which the history of the Jews in Iran turns, particularly as it moves from medieval to modern times, is that of their status as 'outcasts' (pp. 95–102). This might result in the establishment of the *mahalleh*, the Jewish quarter or neighbourhood, technically a 'voluntary' decision on the part of the Jews, or even in forced conversion to Islam, such as in the case of the 'Anusim of Mashad' in 1839 (pp. 115–36). Even as the Jews began to be transformed from 'outcasts' to 'citizens', their questionable standing never really dissipated, as they learned in 1979.

The major contribution of this work revolves around the articles on the twentieth century, and particularly the depictions of social history. There are contributions on clothing and makeup (pp. 175–95), languages and dialects (pp. 283–93), Jewish Persian carpets (pp. 295–309), life events such as births, bar-mitzvahs and weddings (pp. 311–35), mothers, daughters and family life (pp. 403–14) and even sports (pp. 373–78). Numerous pictures have been included in these and most other articles. There are also studies on education (pp. 197–212), Zionism (pp. 237–58) and political history during the last century (pp. 259–72).

As mentioned above, the articles in this volume may not technically qualify as scholarship. Unfortunately, however, the individual tales that they tell combine to form a eulogy for a community that has all but disappeared. Whether read as 'semi-scholarship' or as a eulogy, this volume serves as a fitting memorial and deserves a reading.

JOSHUA SCHWARTZ

MEIRA WEISS, *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society (Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences)*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2002. ix, 176 pp. £34.95. ISBN 0804732728.

Meira Weiss worries that, after this book is read in Israel, 'they will not allow me to come back' (i.e. from sabbatical at Berkeley where the book was written) (p. 136). She fears that she might even be considered a traitor: 'As I watch Israel, I see myself being seen by my country. How will it see me? As a traitor?' (p. 137). By now Weiss, an Associate Professor of Sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, knows that her fears were unfounded. She has returned safely to country and university and 'traitor' is rarely wasted on professors of sociology writing academic tomes in English. Perhaps

¹ A number of articles dealing with the early periods are reprinted, such as that of Amnon Netzer and Parviz Varjav on the Prophet Daniel which originally appeared in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* VI (1993), pp. 657–61, and that of Geo Widengren on the Sasanian Empire, 'The Status of Jews in the Sasanian Empire', pp. 33–40, which is a condensed version of his article of the same name which originally appeared in *Iranica Antiqua* I (1961), pp. 134–54. While the original article became a 'classic' in its field, there should have been some effort made at updating. The article on the Babylonian Talmud by Rabbi Ozer Glickman, pp. 43–48, could have been left out altogether.

² Negin Yavari, 'Toward a History of Jewish–Muslim Interaction in Medieval Iran', pp. 51–59. This reviewer, however, found that this was not the case regarding the contributions of Vera B. Moreen, 'The Safavid Era', pp. 61–74, and David Yeroushalmi, 'Judeo-Persian Literature', pp. 75–93.